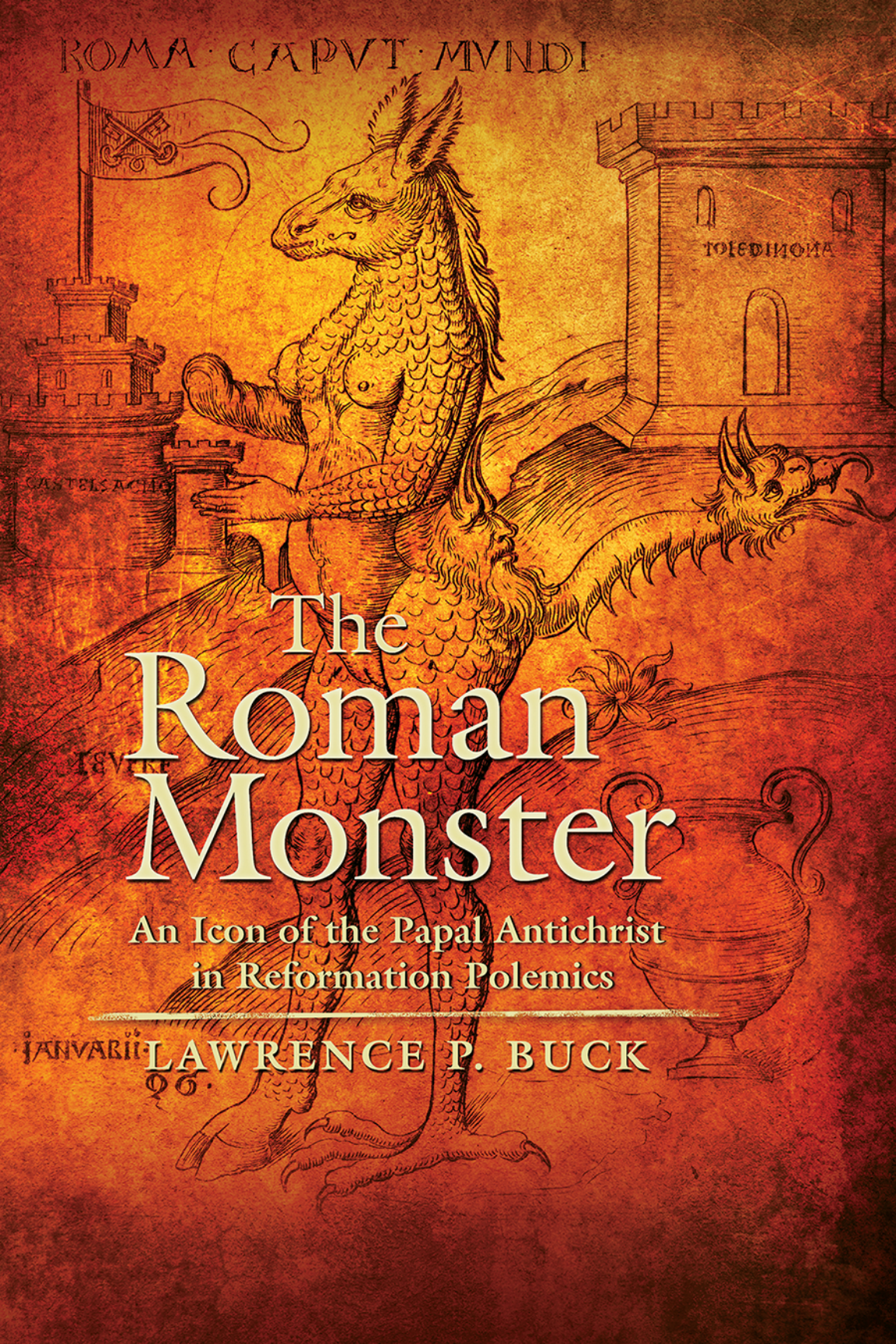


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The Roman Monster

An Icon of the Papal Antichrist
in Reformation Polemics

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LAWRENCE P. BUCK

The Roman Monster

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LAWRENCE P. BUCK



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For Laura, David, and Judy.

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Abbreviations

ADB	<i>Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie</i>
ARG	<i>Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte/Archive for Reformation History</i>
DMA	<i>Dictionary of the Middle Ages</i>
DNB	<i>Dictionary of National Biography</i>
LW	<i>Luther's Works, American Edition</i> . Edited by Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann. Philadelphia and St. Louis, 1955–.
MSW	<i>Melanchthon Selected Writings</i> . Edited by Elmer Ellsworth Flack and Lowell J. Satre. Translated by Charles Leander Hill. Minneapolis, MN, 1962.
MWA	<i>Melanchthons Werke in Auswahl</i> . Vol. 1, <i>Reformatorsche Schriften</i> . Edited by Robert Stupperich. Gütersloh, 1951.
OC&N	Master Nicholas of Dresden. <i>The Old Color and the New</i> . Edited and translated by Howard Kaminsky, Dean Loy Bilderback, Imre Boba, and Patricia N. Rosenberg. <i>Transactions of the American Philosophical Society</i> , n.s., 55, pt. 1 (1965): 3–93.
OCDD	<i>The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church</i> , 2nd ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1974.
PE	<i>Works of Martin Luther</i> . Edited by Henry Eyster Jacobs and Adolph Spaeth. Philadelphia, 1915–43.
St.L.	<i>D. Martin Luthers sämtliche Schriften</i> . Edited by Johann Georg Walch. St. Louis, 1880–1910.
WA	<i>D. Martin Luthers Werke, kritische Gesamtausgabe</i> . Weimar, 1883–.
WABrD.	<i>Martin Luthers Werke, kritische Gesamtausgabe, Briefwechsel</i> . Weimar, 1930–.
WML	<i>The Precious and Sacred Writings of Martin Luther</i> . Edited by John Nicholas Lenker. Vol. 10, <i>Luther's Church Postil Gospels: Advent, Christmas and Epiphany Sermons</i> . Minneapolis, MN, 1905.

Introduction

The Roman Monster

Historical Context

IN DECEMBER 1495, FOLLOWING SEVERAL DAYS of heavy rain, the Tiber River flooded the city of Rome for nearly a week resulting in extensive drowning and destruction. When the waters finally receded, a rumor began to circulate that a grotesque monstrosity had been discovered in the muddy detritus. In a message to the Signoria, the Venetian ambassador to Rome mentioned the story, dating it January 1496. This is the earliest documentation of the report of the Roman monster, a tale that would produce one of the most notorious portents of the Reformation era. The creature itself is inherently fascinating, consisting of an eclectic combination of human and animal body parts. The symbolism of these elements, the interpretations that religious controversialists read into them, and the history of the image itself, help to document antipapal polemics from fifteenth-century Rome to the Elizabethan religious settlement.

The report of the monster from the Tiber gave rise to an illustration that was based on popular iconography, interpreted as a divine portent, and appropriated for religious propaganda. The iconographic elements derived from historic and folkloric commonplaces whose meanings were clear to an audience familiar with such visual symbols. The monster as portent derived from the common opinion that God sent anomalies of nature to warn of impending change and to call sinners to repentance. Such unnatural phenomena, however, needed to be interpreted. Religious controversialists of the Reformation readily appropriated the Roman monster as a polemical trope, explaining it in religious attacks and responses during the course of the sixteenth century.

Because so many different groups interpreted the monster for their own purposes, its history illuminates a variety of themes relevant to the course of the Reformation. Its obscure origins among late medieval heretics in Rome, its adoption as an antipapal cartoon in Bohemia, its explication as a symbol of Lutheran opposition to Catholic practices and teachings, its interpretation

as a figure of the papal Antichrist, its representation in wonder-books¹ as a warning of the imminent apocalypse, and its use by Protestant and Catholic polemicists for propagandistic purposes illustrate facets of the Reformation from late medieval heresies to Counter-Reformation conflicts.

It is difficult for the modern mind to grasp the significance that men and women of the sixteenth century placed on monstrosity. The modern world looks at abnormalities and malformations as a medical issue. In contrast, the medieval world viewed monsters as divine prodigies, warnings from God calling sinners to repentance. Rather than emphasizing etiology and treatment, the medieval perspective focused on symbol and meaning, sign and signified.² The author of *Histoires prodigieuses* (1560), Pierre Boaistuau, wrote that monstrous prodigies force us “to look into ourselves, strike our consciences as with a hammer, examine our vices, and hold in horror our misdeeds.”³ To appreciate the persuasive power that monstrosity as a sign had on the minds of sixteenth-century Christians, it is essential to comprehend certain aspects of the premodern worldview.

First, there was a nearly universal belief that mankind was living at the very end of time, that doomsday was absolutely and indisputably imminent. Luther gives voice to this conviction in his model sermon written on the text for the Second Sunday in Advent, Luke 21:25–36.⁴ The lection speaks of various signs that foretell that the kingdom of God is at hand (verse 31). Luther repeatedly makes the point that “der jüngste Tag sei nicht ferne” (“doomsday is not far off”). The notion that the world was on the very brink of destruction was part of a broader understanding of historical time. The late medieval Christian understood history in a linear fashion. Time began with the fall and the divine promise of a savior; it proceeded toward the teleological goal of the incarnation, believed to come at the approximate midpoint of Christian history; thereafter it would continue until the final judgment. Not only was historical time seen as a structured, “divinely predetermined totality,” it was also perceived as filled with sin and evil. The apocalyptic vision was very

1. On the genre of wonder-books, see chapter 5 below.

2. For a discussion of changing perspectives on monstrosity, see Park and Daston, “Unnatural Conceptions.”

3. From Boaistuau’s dedication of *Histoires prodigieuses* to Jehan de Rieux, quoted and translated in Smith, “Loathly Births off Nature,” 160.

4. WA, 10.1/2:105; St.L., 11:44–73; WML, 10:59–86.

pessimistic about the present; it held that the coming judgment would see the punishment of evil and the triumph of good.⁵

The late medieval Christian also firmly believed in the reality of the Antichrist, an antithesis to Christ that would appear shortly before Judgment Day. There were competing perspectives regarding this doctrine. Some held that the Antichrist would be a personal, incarnate, historical figure who would influence the course of events. Others saw the Antichrist as a composite or collective phenomenon that would appear as pervasive hypocrisy and sinfulness within Christendom. There were also authors who identified the Antichrist either with a particular pope or with the institution of the papacy and the clerical hierarchy, i.e., the papal Antichrist. Scripture taught that the Antichrist would have numerous precursory minions, also called Antichrists, who would foretell the coming of the *summus Antichristus*.

Another element of the late medieval worldview that relates to the popularity of the Roman monster was the belief that signs and wonders conveyed messages from God. Such portents might take the form of anomalies in the heavens, misshapen animals and humans, or even fantastic monstrosities. Eclipses, odd-shaped clouds, and malformed creatures of all sorts were seen as “preachings” from God that cried out for decoding and interpretation, for they called sinners to repentance and prefigured imminent ecclesiastical and/or secular change. University-trained clergy as well as hedgerow preachers and street singers were eager to offer explanations. For example, Luther’s sermon for the Second Sunday in Advent gives apocalyptic interpretations of lunar and solar eclipses, comets, meteor showers, violent storms, the French pox, and indeed also the Roman monster. When Luther learned of this monstrosity from the Tiber, he almost immediately saw the potential for interpreting it as an antipapal portent, a figure of the papal Antichrist.

A preoccupation with the imminence of the apocalypse, a belief in the indisputable reality of the Antichrist, and a fascination with the message conveyed through portents help explain the late medieval mentality that sought to interpret and find meaning in the monstrosity reportedly found in Rome in January 1496. To understand those efforts this study poses five research questions together with associated corollaries.

First, what was the iconographic significance of the monster and its background setting as shown in the surviving Czech copy of the original Italian

5. McGinn, *Visions of the End*, 10.

illustration, that is, the reproduction made by Wenzel von Olmütz (fig. 1)? In other words, what message did the monster and its context convey? Who were the likely originators of the illustration, and what relation existed between their ideology and the iconographic meaning of the symbols in von Olmütz's reproduction?

Second, what was the provenance of the image from Rome in 1496 to Wittenberg in 1523? Related to this question is the issue of how and why an Italian pasquinade came to be copied by a Czech reproduction artist. Finally, how did the Czech copy come to the attention of Philip Melanchthon, who used it to illustrate his pamphlet *The Pope-Ass Explained* (1523)?

Third, what did Philip Melanchthon mean when he called the Roman monster a figure of the papal Antichrist? How had the commonplace of the papal Antichrist developed? How was the papal Antichrist typically described? What meanings had it acquired by the beginning of the sixteenth century?

Fourth, how should one interpret Melanchthon's very popular *The Pope-Ass Explained*? Scholarly opinion has generally held that this piece of propaganda "did not reflect credit"⁶ on its author, that it was not worthy of the great German humanist. Yet, this tract resonated exceedingly well with its audience; it was frequently republished, translated, and imitated. Can a case be made that reconciles the content of this pamphlet with the gravitas of its author?

Finally, in what ways did the Roman monster and Melanchthon's interpretation of it influence Reformation polemics? Given that scholars have judged this monstrous image one of the most popular of Reformation propaganda, how did it acquire this status? What literary and pictorial artifacts document its popularity and influence?

The study of these questions leads to four conclusions that comprise the thesis of this book. (1) The iconographic images that made up the Roman monster illustration (preserved in the von Olmütz reproduction) derived from well-understood historical, religious, and folkloric commonplaces. Their symbolic meaning coincided with the antipapal ideology of two pre-Reformation heretical movements—the Waldensians and the Bohemian Brethren. This fact explains the transformation of the Italian pasquinade into a Bohemian antipapal illustration.

(2) The papal Antichrist commonplace identified the "abomination of desolation" as the collective sinfulness of the papacy and its unrighteous

6. Mackinnon, *Luther and the Reformation*, 3:154.

clergy. Drawing on ideas from John Wyclif, John Hus, and Jakoubek of Střibro, writers such as Nicholas of Dresden and the author of *The Anatomy of the Antichrist* elaborated the theme of the papal Antichrist using a monstrous animalized body as a metaphor for the pope as Antichrist. In *The Pope-Ass Explained*, Melanchthon demonstrates knowledge of this topos.

(3) In writing his polemical tract, Melanchthon cleverly brought together three elements: the literary commonplace of an animalized monstrosity used as a metaphor for the papal Antichrist, Lutheran teachings circa 1523, and the physical image of the Roman monster itself. If one places Melanchthon's text in its historical context, it is clear that the points he makes reflect Lutheran criticisms of Catholic doctrine and disputes with the papacy and its defenders from 1517 to 1523. This being the case, his interpretation of the pope-ass could serve as a kind of mnemonic device summarizing the principal Lutheran criticisms of the Roman Church. As a humanist pedagogue, Melanchthon rejected the medieval *ars memorandi* (art of memory images) as a teaching tool.⁷ Yet his explication of the image of the pope-ass and Lucas Cranach's accompanying illustration of the monster could serve as just such an aid to memory for summarizing Lutheran teachings.⁸

(4) The Roman monster entered into the discourse of the Reformation not only due to the popularity and persuasiveness of Melanchthon's pamphlet, but also because numerous authors adopted it as a polemical trope and/or an apocalyptic omen. As one of the age's most prolific writers, Luther frequently used the pope-ass together with a lexicon of asininity to ridicule and defame the papacy and the clerical hierarchy. When Melanchthon expanded his original *The Pope-Ass Explained* in 1535, Luther added his own approbation, reaffirming the monster as a divine portent of the papal Antichrist. Melanchthon's pamphlet enjoyed frequent reprintings and was translated into French, Dutch, Low German, Latin, and English. It even inspired a French Catholic and an English Protestant to write their own interpretations of the creature's anatomy. In addition, the image of the Roman monster became a standard apocalyptic omen included in the popular genre of wonder-books, especially in Germany and England. In all of these ways, the image of the Roman monster became established as an emblematic metaphor in the rhetoric of the Reformation.

7. Yates, *Art of Memory*, 127.

8. Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature*, 182, point out the similarity between monstrous figures and art of memory images.

This study is intended both for scholars and general readers interested in early modern Europe. To make the material accessible, the text provides identifying information and dates for individuals who might not be familiar to a general audience. In discussing topics likely to be unfamiliar to the non-specialist, appropriate background information is provided. Quotations of primary sources appear in English, with a citation to a scholarly translation if one exists. Otherwise, all translations are original with this study. Quotations of scripture are from the Douai-Rheims version of the Bible. For the reader who wants to delve more deeply into a given topic, notes provide an introduction to the historical literature.

The recent past has seen many investigations of monstrous portents: Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park's *Wonders and the Order of Nature* (chap. 5), Dudley Wilson's *Signs and Portents*, Irene Ewinkel's *De monstis*, Ottavia Niccoli's *Prophecy and People in Renaissance Italy*, Alan W. Bates's *Emblematic Monsters*, Julie Crawford's *Marvelous Protestantism*, Jennifer Spinks's *Monstrous Births and Visual Culture in Sixteenth-Century Germany*, and Philip M. Soergel's *Miracles and the Protestant Imagination*, to name just a few excellent studies of this topic. None of these, however, has treated the Roman monster or Philip Melanchthon's pamphlet in detail. In fact, the only monographic study of this topic is *Der Papstesel* published in 1891 by the German art historian Konrad von Lange.⁹ This was a groundbreaking investigation of the symbols in Wenzel von Olmütz's illustration. However, recent research into the intersection of folklore and iconography has opened up new understandings that have relevance to the theme of asininity.¹⁰ Also, von Lange provided little background on the papal antichrist and he did not delve into the historical context within which Melanchthon wrote his tract.

The appendix provides the first English translation of Melanchthon's 1523 version of *The Pope-Ass Explained*.¹¹ As discussed in chapter 5, in 1579 John Brooke translated the pope-ass tract into English using as his source the 1557 French translation of the 1535 German revision. In 1823, Henry Cole (1792–1858), an Anglican cleric of strong Calvinist persuasion, again translated the pope-ass pamphlet, likewise using the 1535 text. Cole rendered a free translation that also included Luther's 1535 approbation as though it

9. Lange, *Der Papstesel*.

10. Mellinkoff, "Riding Backwards."

11. Indicated as A1, this text is in WA, 11:375–79. A modern German version of this text can be found in St.L., 19:1934–38.

were part of Melanchthon's text. The Cole translation is difficult to obtain and cannot be used for scholarly purposes.¹²

This study reexamines von Lange's treatment of the iconography of the pope-ass image, it offers ideological reasons for associating the image with the Waldensians and Bohemian Brethren, it accounts for the reproduction and survival of the monster's image in sixteenth-century Bohemia, it provides historical background on the topos of the papal Antichrist, it contextualizes Melanchthon's tract within the first five years of the Lutheran movement, and it documents the popularity of the pope-ass within the polemical and apocalyptic writings of the Reformation.

12. Melanchthon, *Interpretation of the Ass-Pope*.

Chapter 1

The Roman Monster of 1496

From Pious Portent to Political Pasquinade



PHILIP MELANCHTHON'S 1523 PAMPHLET known as the *The Pope-Ass Explained* is one of the most famous pieces of propaganda for the early Lutheran Reformation. In it he denounces the papacy by explicating the parts of a portentous monstrosity as symbols of papal corruption and error. Historians have long known that Melanchthon's monster image was based on a copper engraving that came to Luther's attention from Bohemia. Although at one time misidentified as an illustration from the workshop of Michael Wolgemut, Melanchthon's source has been definitively attributed to the Moravian goldsmith, copper engraver, and reproduction artist Wenzel von Olmütz.

Far from being a simple picture of a pious portent, the von Olmütz engraving brings together a variety of folkloric and political symbols to express a powerful denunciation of papal claims to secular authority. These symbols, though speaking in symbolic code, clearly represent the ecclesiological ideology of two heretical movements of the late Middle Ages, the Waldensians and the Bohemian Brethren (or *Unitas Fratrum*).

The only extant version of this political illustration is a reproduction that von Olmütz made from an Italian original (fig. 1). The Roman Waldensians were probably responsible for the first politicized picture of the monster, possibly with the aid of two members of the *Unitas Fratrum* who visited Rome in 1498. One of these visitors, Luke of Prague, was the leader of a faction of the Unity, the Major Party. At a meeting of the Brethren, the Conference of Chlumec, he had attempted to find common ground with his opponents, members of the Minor Party, by emphasizing the shared opposition of both groups to papal claims for secular jurisdiction, precisely the message of the von Olmütz engraving. Indeed, there is strong circumstantial evidence that the emissaries from the Unity were in fact the ones who carried the original Roman version of the monster north to Bohemia and Moravia. Thus, in crafting his propaganda treatise for Lutheranism, Melanchthon drew on imagery from pre-Reformation popular religious movements.

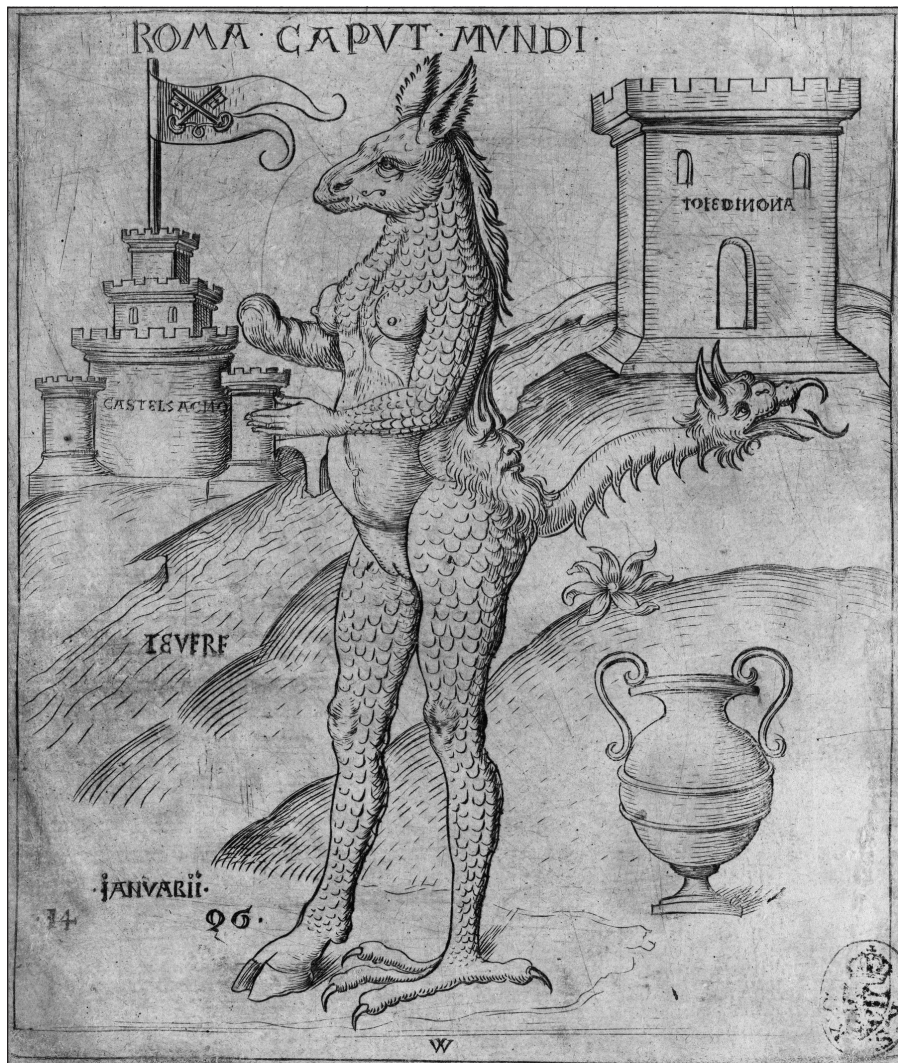


Figure 1: *Roma caput mundi*, reproduction of Roman monster by Wenzel von Olmütz (1498). Photo by Herbert Boswank, courtesy of Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden.

The Roman Flood, 1495/96

The legend of the Roman monster had its beginnings in the great Roman flood of 1495/96. As the floodwaters receded, a popular eschatological poem reported the flood as a warning sign from God. The disaster also gave rise to one of the most enduring polemical images of the Reformation era. More infamous than the flood itself, this monstrosity played an important role in subsequent portent literature, in religious propaganda, and in the encyclopedic wonder-books of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

During the first week of December 1495, Rome experienced a heavy downpour that lasted for four days.¹ Then, suddenly, the rain stopped. As the sky cleared, the Tiber, famous since antiquity for devastating floods, began to transform into a raging torrent.

Tiber floods were frequent during the late Middle Ages (1422, 1470, 1476, 1495, 1500, 1530, 1552, and 1598).² Systematic deforestation that had occurred during the 1300s and 1400s throughout much of Italy greatly exacerbated the situation. Also, construction along the banks of the river caused irregularities in the width of the riverbed, creating bottlenecks for the rushing water. Floating mills moored along the riverbank could break loose in a torrent and get caught on a bridge, thus forming a dam. By the late 1400s flooding had become an urgent problem for Rome as well as for many other parts of Italy.

On Friday, December 4 (St. Barbara's Day), the waters rose to the point that the bridge to Castel Sant'Angelo became nearly impassible; a group of cardinals who had a meeting in the castle in the morning were barely able to cross the bridge at noon. Large sections of the medieval city were suddenly inundated. Papal prisoners held in the Tor di Nona across the river from the Castel Sant'Angelo drowned in the torrent. The flood continued to rise for five days, finally reaching a high-water point of twenty-four feet above normal.

The flood was especially devastating because it did most of its damage in the low-lying area within the bend of the Tiber, from the Castel Sant'Angelo in the north to the Jewish ghetto in the south and from the river eastward past the Pantheon and Santa Maria sopra Minerva. In that section of the city resided more than 60 percent of the city's inhabitants.³ Not surprisingly, those

1. Gregorovius, *Geschichte der Stadt Rom*, vol. 2, bk. 13, chap. 4, sec. 6, 804–5; Reumont, *Geschichte der Stadt Rom*, 3.1:434–35; Pastor, *History of the Popes*, 5:475–80; Lange, *Der Papstesel*, 15–19.

2. Reumont, *Geschichte der Stadt Rom*, 3.1:434, 435, 541–55; 3.2:893–94, 897.

3. Stringer, *Renaissance in Rome*, 24.

who lived in the floodplain included the city's poorest citizens. Based upon a census taken a generation after the flood, it appears that this area may have been home to some 34,000 inhabitants. Consisting of a "warren of narrow, unpaved streets and alleys,"⁴ it looked like a decayed medieval village where the poor "huddled in squalor."⁵

The floodwaters rose so quickly that people were literally flooded out of their beds at night. They attempted to seek refuge by climbing onto rooftops or running to higher ground. The torrent weakened the foundations of numerous buildings, which simply collapsed, burying the inhabitants in rubble. The flood swept away buildings, bridges, mills, provisions, and even livestock. It befouled the wells and damaged cultivation in the countryside. Rescuers attempted to navigate the floodwaters in small boats or in wooden tubs, using long poles to move about.⁶ After five days, the waters finally began to recede. (One can still find several plaques in Rome indicating the 1495 high-water mark, for example, in the Via del Paradiso, near Sant'Eustachio and on the façade of Santa Maria sopra Minerva.)⁷ The shortage of potable water and foodstuffs, the rotting corpses of animals, and the general unhygienic conditions contributed to widespread illness. Even Pope Alexander VI briefly fell victim of a fever.

Reports began to circulate that the receding waters had revealed a dead monstrosity in the midst of the muddy debris, which the Romans interpreted as a divine portent. The creature supposedly had the head and body of an ass, the breasts and pudendum of a woman. For feet, it had a cloven hoof and a claw. One hand was that of a human; the other was the tip of an elephant's trunk. Except for its naked breasts and belly, it was covered with black scales. On its backside, it had an old man's bearded face as well as a tail in the form of a dragon's neck with a serpent's head at the end.⁸

4. Ibid., 24–26.

5. Ibid., 24.

6. See the woodcut illustration on the first page of Dati's *Del diluuio di Roma*.

7. Lange, *Der Papstesel*, 16; Reumont, *Geschichte der Stadt Rom*, 3.1:574: The Santa Maria sopra Minerva inscription reads: "Ann. Chr. mud. non. Decemb. / Auctus in immensum Tiberis dum / profluit alveo / Extulit huc tumidas turbidus / amnis aquas." The plaque near the church of Sant'Eustachio reads: "AN SAL M VD TIBERIS SERENO AERE AD HOC—SIG CREVIT NON DECEMBR ALEX VI P M AN III" ["In the year 1495, the Tiber, on a fine day, grew up to this sign on the nonae (5th) of December Alexander VI Pope—Year III"]. "Curious and Unusual 3: The Floods of the River Tiber," in *Virtual Roma* at <http://roma.andreapollett.com/S1/roma-c4.htm>.

8. Malipiero, *Annali Veneti*, quoted in Lange, *Der Papstesel*, 18n2.

Unraveling the origins and meaning of this story poses an intriguing mystery. The earliest sources of information about the flood and the legend of the monster include a street crier's poetic description, a bas-relief representation, a report from a diplomat to the Venetian Signoria, a panegyric dedicated to the Duke of Ferrara, a description first published in 1584 but based on an earlier account, and a copper engraving from a Moravian goldsmith. Explicit and implicit information from these sources lead to the conclusion that contemporary reports of the monster had at least two variants. One represented the creature as a curious monstrosity, a divine portent. The other added an allegorical setting containing emblems and symbols that conveyed political and ecclesiastical content. In both cases, the monster itself was a composite of theological and folkloric topoi that contemporary observers would have understood on various levels. The more "political" of the two versions conveyed a multiplicity of meanings with references to the pope and emperor.

One of the earliest, if not *the* earliest description of the 1495 Tiber flood was a poem by Giuliano Dati entitled *Del diluio di Roma*. Best known for his popularization of Christopher Columbus's voyage of discovery of 1492,⁹ Dati chronicled the flood in a work written for popular street criers or tale singers (*cantambanchi*, *cantastorie*), who traveled the cities with portable platforms and benches, declaiming their songs to any who would pay for a seat in the audience.¹⁰ Treating the 1495 flood as a divine portent, Dati gave a detailed description of the events of the deluge. Significantly, however, he did not mention the monster in his poem. Given that the popularity of a bench singer depended upon his song's containing contemporaneous and sensational information, one can only assume that, at the time Dati wrote his poem, the story of the monster had not yet surfaced. This means that he probably finished his work in the last days of December 1495 or the first days of January 1496.¹¹

A passage in the *Annals* of the Venetian senator and historian Domenico Malipiero dates the legend of the monster to January 1496. Malipiero included the following comment after a description of the flood of the Tiber:

9. Dati, *Columbus in Italy*.

10. Niccoli, *Prophecy and People*, 12–14.

11. Dati, *Del diluio di Roma del M.CCCC.lxxxxv A di .iiii. di dicembre Et daltre cose di gran marauiglia*, British Library, listed as number 7996 in *Gesamtkatalog der Wiegendrucke*, vol. 7. This same catalogue of incunabula also lists a second version printed in Rome by Johann Besicken and Sigismund Mayr, number 7995. Both versions are noted as having been printed "after December 4, 1495." See also a modern transcription edited by Anna Esposito and Paula Farenga.

During the present month of January [1496], once the Tiber had receded, there was found in Rome on the bank of the river, a monster that appeared to have the head of an ass with long ears and the body of a human female. Its left arm was of human shape, the right had, at its tip, an elephant's snout. Behind, on the posterior part, [there was] an old man's face with a human beard. From its tail there came forth a long neck with a serpent's head, with its mouth open. The right foot was an eagle's [claw] with talons; the left foot, an ox's. The legs, from the sole [of the feet] up, along with its whole body [were] scaly like a fish. And these details are contained in the letters of the ambassador to the Signoria.¹²

This report was added in passing at the end of a diplomatic dispatch to the Venetian government.

Apparently the legend of the monstrosity became an almost overnight sensation. Sometime between 1496 and 1497 the artists Tommaso and Jacopo Rodari of Maroggia sculpted an image of the monster as a decorative bas-relief on the northern portal of the cathedral of Como (see fig. 2). This church was under construction in the last years of the fifteenth century; these two brothers completed several pieces of decorative sculpture for the cathedral.

The Como image, like the Venetian ambassador's report, contains no hint of political or religious critique. Unlike the version done later in Moravia, the Como relief has no symbolic contextual setting. Rather the space around the monster is filled with two ribbons, two fascicles of leaves (or possibly two aspergilli), and two bearded faces that appear to be part of a sea monster. If the bundles are indeed aspergilli, they could symbolize an exorcism of the evil of the monsters. In any case, there is no clear political, antipapal, or ecclesiastical meaning in these items. This leads to the conclusion that, in its earliest form, the legend of the Roman monster (and its pictorial representation) was a manifestation of popular piety, without a political or ideological point of view.

Woodcut pictures often illustrated chapbooks, broadsheets, or the songs of street criers. If the story of the Roman monster gave rise to illustrated broadsheets or street songs, then it is probable that the Venetian ambassador and the Rodari brothers used such illustrations for their information about the monstrosity. An illustration presumably came into the hands of the Rodari brothers who then used the image to decorate the cathedral's northern portal, which was just then under construction.

12. Quoted in Lange, *Der Papstesel*, 18n2.



Figure 2: Como bas-relief of Roman monster by Tommaso and Jacopo Rodari (1496–97). Photo by Lawrence P. Buck.

While the first representation of the monster may have served to illustrate a pious broadsheet or a street singer's song, the politicized version was more likely made as part of a satiric pasquinade. In early sixteenth-century Rome, the custom developed of affixing satiric epigrams, including illustrations, to an antique statue that was dubbed "Pasquino"; the satires are known as pasquinades.¹³ It appears likely that an Italian version of the monster, no longer extant, was made as part of such a satiric pasquinade, and that this depiction found its way into the hands of the Moravian goldsmith and engraver Wenzel von Olmütz.

Besides the bas-relief at Como and the Venetian ambassador's description, another detailed depiction exists in a poem by Francesco Rocociolo,¹⁴ written as a panegyric for Duke Ercole d'Este of Ferrara. The British Museum catalogue dates this poem from about 1500. In hyperbolic verse, Rocociolo describes the monster's features. Stating that he learned of the monstrosity through a picture he received from Venice, he makes clear that the legend of the monster had become a cause célèbre in Renaissance Italy. He describes features identical to those presented by the Venetian ambassador and the von Olmütz engraving, but differing in some detail from the Como bas-relief and from a description by Giovan Paolo Lomazzo (1538–1600).

In 1584, Lomazzo published his *Trattato dell'arte della pittura*. Though written eighty-nine years after the event, scholars believe that, for his description of the monster, he used an earlier source. He wrote, "In Rome in the year 1496, as the story goes, a monster with an ass's head is supposed to have been born. Its belly, breasts, genitals, hand, right arm, neck and legs had a human contour, but were covered with scales. The right foot was that of an eagle, the left, that of an ox. On the hind part there was a human face as well as a tail that had the form of a serpent's neck with a serpent's head at the end. The

13. Ibid., 32: While the Pasquino statue was first unearthed and displayed in 1501, the custom of posting critiques can be dated as far back as the papacy of Sixtus IV (1471–84) and Innocent VIII (1484–92). At that time, the satires were posted not on the Pasquino statue, but on the portico of the papal library. During the papacy of Alexander VI, the posting of satiric epigrams became more frequent than ever before. See also Stringer, *Renaissance in Rome*, 50–51; Chastel, *Sack of Rome, 1527*; Niccoli, *Prophecy and People*, 36; Bedini, *Pope's Elephant*, 101–5.

14. Rocociolo, . . . *de monstro Romae in Tyberi*. Rocociolo makes a passing reference to "Roma caput mundi," which suggests that he may have seen the politicized version of the monster, but he does not mention the other political images in the von Olmütz version. From the language of the poem, it is not possible to say with certainty which version Rocociolo saw. Pastor, *History of the Popes*, 5:480, states that he "sought in vain . . . for a copy of this rare book." I have used the copy held in the British Library.

left arm had the form of a stump.”¹⁵ Lomazzo thus corroborates the existence of the story of the monster. His description, though identical to the Como bas-relief, differs in certain respects from the von Olmütz version, from the ambassador’s description, and from the account by Rocociolo.

The only extant drawing of the monster comes not from Italy, but from Moravia. There a goldsmith and copper engraver, Wenzel von Olmütz, made his own version of the beast, apparently based upon an Italian copy that had come into his hands (fig. 1). Unlike the Como version, von Olmütz’s picture contains numerous iconographic and symbolic elements that convey political and ecclesiastical content. The figure has a left hand that is human, a right arm that could be the end of an elephant’s trunk, a left foot that is an eagle’s claw, and a right foot that is a cloven hoof. Von Lange dates the engraving to the second half of 1498.¹⁶

There are thus five sources—three descriptions and two representations—and three known variants of the composition of the monstrosity. Lomazzo’s description and the Como relief have identical configurations; the ambassador’s description agrees with von Olmütz’s depiction of the monster’s arms and hands but von Olmütz reverses the depiction of the feet, showing the left as having talons and the right as cloven. Rocociolo describes the left hand as human (thus agreeing with the ambassador and von Olmütz) but he does not specify which foot has talons and which is cloven. These differences, together with the radically different backgrounds of the Como and the von Olmütz versions, suggest that there was more than one early picture of the monstrosity in circulation in Rome and northern Italy. One of these presented a monstrous portent, possibly as an illustration for an ephemeral broadsheet or a bench singer’s song; another added iconographic content that identified not only with the tradition of portent literature, but also with the tradition of satiric, epigrammatic placards. (One may describe these placards as “pasquinades,” though that term is somewhat anachronistic when applied prior to 1501.)¹⁷ It is this latter depiction that ultimately became the basis for Philip Melanchthon’s famous *The Pope-Ass Explained*.

15. Lange, *Der Papstesel*, 39.

16. *Ibid.*, 74.

17. See note 13 above.

Iconographic Meaning of the Ass

Melanchthon, of course, gave his own Lutheran interpretation to the elements of the monster's picture. While his imputed meanings are important for understanding the way Reformation propaganda exploited the monstrosity, they reveal little about the fifteenth-century Italians' understanding of the legend or its pictorial representation. In order to understand this mentality, it is necessary not only to study the portent literature of the late Middle Ages, but also the social, folkloric, literary, and religious sources that provide the iconographic motifs represented in von Olmütz's engraving. His version (and the Italian original upon which it was undoubtedly based) presents a congeries of topoi that possessed communicative power because they spoke through popularly understood symbols that conveyed multiple layers of meaning.

The story of the Roman monster exemplifies the preoccupation of the late medieval world with signs and portents. A monstrosity was merely one of a number of kinds of aberrations of nature that contemporaries perceived as divine messages, presaging events to come or calling Christians to repentance. Reported in numerous broadsheets, such portents might be meteorological, astronomical, physiological, or entirely fantastical. Examples include damaging winds, hailstorms, floods, multiple "moons," odd-shaped cloud formations, births of misshapen animals, malformed babies, and composite fantasy creatures with body parts drawn from a wide range of zoological and mythical creatures. Nature is God's creation; monsters, a visible sign of sin, are perversions of nature allowed by God as warnings to mankind. Belief in portents combines notions of sin and repentance to divination. Extracting the correct meaning from a supernatural event (*monstrum*) and properly modifying behavior, make possible the avoidance of catastrophe. Thus observation of nature, analysis of contemporary events, and religious reflection join together into an integrated worldview.¹⁸

It is not surprising that the story of the dead creature washed up on the banks of the Tiber resonated with men and women of the late fifteenth

18. Niccoli, *Prophecy and People*, xvi; Andersson, "Popular Imagery in German Reformation Broadsheets," 129; Wilson, *Signs and Portents*, 22. In his *Physica (Initia doctrinae physicae)*, Melanchthon describes four categories of *monstra*: spirits such as angels, unusual occurrences in the heavens such as comets, prodigious apparitions in the sky such as cloud formations portraying fighting armies, and creatures with portentous abnormalities; see Cameron, *Enchanted Europe*, 184. See also Barnes, *Prophecy and Gnosis*; Park and Daston, "Unusual Conceptions," 20–54; Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature*; Platt, *Wonders, Marvels, and Monsters*; Schenda, "Die deutschen Prodigiensammlungen," 637–710; Zambelli, "Astrologi hallucinati"

century. It consisted of a number of elements that conveyed connotative meanings that contemporary witnesses would have readily understood. The dominant form in both the verbal report and its pictorial representation is the ass. One must therefore begin by inquiring into the meaning of the ass in the late Middle Ages. Linguistic usage, iconographic tradition, folk custom, juridical practice, and even patristic authority connect the image of the ass with concepts of derision, scorn, ridicule, foolishness, and false belief. The contemporary observer would have understood the representation of the monster through this prism of preconceptions.

The medieval Latin verb *asino* means “to be foolish.”¹⁹ In early New High German, the phrase *einen auf den Esel sezen* means “to ridicule someone” or “to make someone laughable or ridiculous.”²⁰ This last meaning was, in fact, grounded in actual custom, for it was the practice throughout the Middle Ages to use an ass as a means of ridiculing or punishing a wrongdoer.

Ridicule as a form of punishment was based upon the notion of *fama* or social reputation, a concept highly prized in the world of the late Middle Ages. *Fama* was understood “as a person’s social extension, that which determined his or her standing within a community.” Thus, to force ridicule upon someone was to injure that person’s social reputation, his standing within the community. In this context, the medieval rituals of ridicule did more than just hurt the victim’s feelings or embarrass him. Ridicule damaged the victim’s self-image, social reputation, and communal identity.²¹

Examples of the ass’s being used as an instrument of scorn and ridicule can be found as early as the tenth century, but are especially common in the fourteenth through the sixteenth centuries. For example, as early as 990, an antipope was punished “by being mutilated and then made to ride backwards on an ass. . . .”²² In Rome, in 1184, the populace seized a number of unpopular clerks in the service of Pope Lucius III, put out the eyes of all but one of the unfortunate bureaucrats, set them backwards on asses, and sent them off to the pope.²³ In ca. 1540 the vicar of St. John’s church in Min-

19. Jones, *Secret Middle Ages*, 313n28.

20. Götze, *Frühneuhochdeutsches Glossar*, 70; Moxey, “Hieronymus Bosch and the ‘World Upside Down,’” 125.

21. Puff, *Sodomy in Reformation Germany and Switzerland*, 112–15.

22. The antipope was Johannes Philagatos; see Mellinkoff, “Riding Backwards,” 154; Jones, *Secret Middle Ages*, 150.

23. *Ibid.*, 87.

den sent a threatening *Schandbild* (slandorous illustration) to the abbot and monastery of SS. Simeon and Mauritius in Minden in an effort to collect rents owed to St. John's. The illustration depicts the abbot riding backwards on an ass, with the hood of his cowl displaying ass ears.²⁴ In medieval England, men who were physically abused by their wives suffered further communal humiliation by being "paraded through the streets backwards on an ass." (In the Midlands, this ride was known as a "skimmington" or a "skimmety.")²⁵ In rural Franche-Comté, wives could take revenge on their husbands for beating them by making them ride an ass through the village.²⁶ In 1444, a Dalmatian ecclesiastical court condemned an elderly woman for using spells to lure rich lovers to her daughter. Her punishment was "to be led through the town by her daughter, seated on a donkey but turned backwards to face its tail."²⁷ In 1393, Gian Galeazzo Visconti, Duke of Milan, issued a decree ordering that anyone convicted of forgery, poisoning, or murder was "to be led on an ass, with a paper mitre on his head, through high-street and other public places of this city or state."²⁸ In yet another example, a woodcut from the early sixteenth century entitled *All Ride the Ass* shows a man being given the "ass/backwards" punishment while a shrew pulls his hair and a fool pulls on the donkey's tail.²⁹

A related meaning of the medieval asinine symbol is the fool or foolishness. For the English-speaking world, the most famous example of this topos is Bottom in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. However, numerous other examples exist on the Continent. For example, a woodcut from the *Spiegel des menschlichen Lebens* published in Augsburg in the 1470s shows a schoolboy dunce wearing an ass's head.³⁰ Another example of the fool as ass can be seen in Sandro Botticelli's *Calumny of Apelles* (1497–98) in which Midas, the unjust judge, has ass's ears. Likewise, Barthel Beham, in his woodcut *Two Greedy Fools* (ca. 1524) uses ass's ears on the typical fool's costume.

A third connotative meaning of the ass harkens back to ancient times, when pagans alleged that Christians worshiped an ass-headed god. In this

24. Ibid., 98–99, and ill. 8.

25. See Mellinkoff, "Riding Backwards," 163–64; Davis, "Women on Top," 168.

26. Ibid., 170; Mellinkoff, "Riding Backwards," 163.

27. Jones, *Secret Middle Ages*, 88.

28. Ibid., 87.

29. Ibid., 7. During the Inquisition in sixteenth-century Spain, condemned heretics were placed backwards on an ass and led to the place of their execution; Mellinkoff, "Riding Backwards," 159. See also *ibid.*, fig. 6, showing an illustration of a bishop riding backwards on an ass from northern France, ca. 1280.

30. Ibid., 72.

tradition, the ass represents false belief. The Latin church father Tertullian, wrote in his *Apology* (ca. AD 197), “A new representation of our [Christian] god has quite recently been publicized in this city [Carthage], started by a certain criminal hired to dodge wild beasts in the arena. He displayed a picture with this inscription: ‘*Onokoites* [the offspring of an ass], the god of the Christians.’ The figure had the ears of an ass, one foot was cloven, and it was dressed in a toga and carrying a book.”³¹ An even earlier version of this topos dates back to the first century BC when Alexandrian Greeks started a rumor that the god of the Jews had the form of an ass.³² Also, scholars of ancient Rome have discovered an antique graffito on Rome’s Palatine Hill showing a crude picture of a man worshipping a crucified figure with an ass’s head bearing the inscription, “Alexamenos worships his god.”³³ To the medieval mind, the image of the ass carried the connotations of false belief as well as scorn, ridicule, and foolishness.

Aside from the basic asinine form, the 1496 Roman monster has a number of characteristics that are consistent with medieval demonic iconography. When examining this artistic tradition it is important to keep several points in mind. First, the medieval pictorial tradition representing the devil is amorphous; there is no clear scriptural description upon which to base illustrative motifs. “This lack of a pictorial tradition combined with literary sources that confuse the Devil, Satan, Lucifer and demons are important reasons for the lack of a unified image of the Devil and for the erratic iconography.”³⁴ Second, one must draw a distinction between *the* devil and *a* devil. *The* devil, per se, appears in two main roles—as the dragon vanquished by Archangel Michael in the apocalypse and as the punisher of sinners at the Last Judgment.³⁵ On the other hand, generic devils and demons appear in a myriad of places and guises, causing everything from flatulence to sour milk. Third, the representation of devils and demons evolves during the Middle Ages. When shown on his throne in hell, the devil is a fat, ugly, usually black figure without wings, horns, hoofs, or a tail. When represented outside of hell in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, devils have horns, hoofs, talons, and tails; in the fourteenth century they begin to be shown with the wings of a bat; and in the

31. Tertullian, *Apologetical Works*, 51. See also Cohn, *Europe’s Inner Demons*, 2.

32. Cohn, *Europe’s Inner Demons*, 5.

33. Tertullian, *Apologetical Works*, 51n9.

34. Link, *Devil*, 44; Holländer, *Wunder, Wundergeburt und Wundergestalt*, 314–15.

35. Link, *Devil*, 40.

fifteenth and sixteenth centuries they take on more of the look of rebel angels, Michael's evil counterparts.³⁶

Keeping this amorphous pictorial tradition in mind, one can nevertheless draw some general conclusions about diabolical iconography in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Typically, devils in this period are represented with ram's horns, with cloven hoofs, ass's hoofs, or griffon-like claws, with scales or black fur, and with large tails. Sometimes they also have dragon or serpent-like elements, and wings that are either like those of an angel or a bat. Other characteristics that might appear include nakedness, hairiness, large or prominent teeth, large ears, and a face on the rump.³⁷

While the symbolism of the asinine and diabolical characteristics of the monster has multiple meanings, it is fairly straightforward to decode. The meaning of the elephantine right arm, however, poses a somewhat more problematic crux. On a literal level, one might assume that the reference is to strength or power, given the obvious association of these qualities with elephants. But events in Italy in the last years of the fifteenth century suggest another meaning. During the course of 1496, a variety of records make mention of a disease that contemporaries perceived as new and incurable. Both laymen and university medical men believed that this pest had been brought to Italy by the forces of Charles VIII. It thus came to be known as the "French disease" (a sexually transmitted malady assumed by most historians to have been venereal syphilis). Also known as the "great pox," it spread rapidly and became the scourge of commoner and noble alike. In attempting to explain the etiology of this malady, fifteenth-century scholars turned to the medical authorities of antiquity. One such scholar was Sebastiano dall'Aquila, lecturer of philosophy and medicine at the University of Ferrara. He argued that the French disease was the condition that Galen had labeled "elephantiasis."³⁸ He put forward this thesis at a disputation on the topic of the great pox held at Ferrara at the end of March and the beginning of April 1497. This idea was by no means limited to university professors of medicine. Chroniclers such as the Roman Raffaello da Volterra, the Genoese Bartolomeo Senarega, and

36. Ibid., 72–73. See also *Der Physiologus*, s.v. "der Wildesel."

37. Link, *Devil*, esp. chap. 2; Holländer, *Wunder, Wundergeburt und Wundergestalt*; Emmerson, *Antichrist in the Middle Ages*; Jones, *Secret Middle Ages*, 73, 62. For the demonic face on the rump, see Jones, *Secret Middle Ages*, 62; Mellinkoff, *Outcasts*, 2:pl. xi.1, showing the crucifixion scene from the *Hours of Elizabeth the Queen, England, c. 1420–1430*, London, British Library, MS. Add. 50001, fol. 37v; and the painting of *St. Wolfgang and the Devil* by Michael Pacher (ca. 1475–79), in the Alte Pinakothek in Munich.

38. Arrizabalaga, Henderson, and French, *Great Pox*, 77–82.

the German Johannes Nauclerus likewise referred to the French disease as elephantiasis.³⁹ The assumption that the French disease was elephantiasis was thus widely disseminated. This, in turn, justifies the contention that the elephant's trunk is a graphic reference to sickness and disease, especially to the sickness of the great pox.

Whether understood as a sign of power or of pestilence, the elephant's trunk is an exotic zoological specimen to include in a composite representation of a divine portent. Clearly the artists who drew pictures of the monster and who sculpted it in bas-relief had little firsthand knowledge of an elephant's anatomy, for the trunk is rendered without nostrils! In fact, in Melanchthon's *The Pope-Ass Explained*, the snout described in Malipiero's version of the story becomes an elephant's foot, but drawn to look like a horse's hoof.

There remains the issue of the ass's blatantly exposed female sexuality. In the late Middle Ages, female nakedness stood for sin, carnality, and pollution. A picture of a naked woman was understood as a reference to Eve, whose disobedience brought evil into the created world. Women were perceived as driven by insatiable sexual appetites that made them susceptible to demonic seduction. Because of their monthly menstruation, they were also seen as self-polluting. The infamous witch-hunter Heinrich Kramer summed up many medieval misogynistic commonplaces in the *Malleus Maleficarum*:

What else is a woman but a foe to friendship, an unescapable punishment, a necessary evil, a natural temptation, a desirable calamity, a domestic danger, a delectable detriment, an evil of nature, painted with fair colours! . . . When a woman thinks alone, she thinks evil. . . . All wickedness is but little to the wickedness of a woman. . . . For it is true that in the Old Testament the Scriptures have much that is evil to say about women, and this because of the first temptress, Eve, and her imitators. . . . [S]ince they [women] are feebler both in mind and body, it is not surprising that they should come more under the spell of witchcraft. . . . [S]he [a woman] is more carnal than a man, as is clear from her many carnal abominations. . . . [T]hrough the first defect in their intelligence they are more prone to abjure the faith; so through their second defect of inordinate affections and passions they search for, brood over, and inflict various vengeance, either by witchcraft, or by some other means. . . . [A] woman is beautiful to look upon, contaminating to touch, and deadly to

39. Ibid., 25; Lange, *Der Papstesel*, 12, 36.

keep. . . . To conclude. All witchcraft comes from carnal lust, which is in women insatiable.⁴⁰

The monster's naked breasts and pudendum reflect this anti-feminist tradition linking the female body with insatiable lust, pollution, and demonic possession.⁴¹

The earliest version of the story of the monster as well as the earliest representation of the beast drew upon a fund of popular images whose connotative meanings symbolized power or pestilence indeed, but more important, ridicule, foolishness, false belief, carnality, and demonic presence. However, the image of the monster that Wenzel von Olmütz reproduced added a setting that contained equally well-understood symbols that conveyed an ideological content not present in the early description of the monstrosity or in the bas-relief on the Como cathedral. It is necessary, therefore, to explain these contextual symbols and the ideas they represent.

Several elements in the setting clearly reference the 1495/96 flood: the Tiber River labeled "TēVFRF"; the pool of water in which the monster stands, representing the river flowing over its banks; the date "·JANVARII·1496"; and the large amphora, representing the astrological sign of Aquarius. This astrological symbol was probably included to give a more specific date for the discovery of the monster; according to the medieval calendar, the sun entered the sign of Aquarius on the 18th of January.⁴²

Two symbols reference Wenzel von Olmütz himself: the "W" at the bottom center of the picture and the flower below the monster's tail. In addition to his work as a copper engraver, von Olmütz was a goldsmith who also made pattern books for apprentices. Part of a goldsmith's repertoire was to make plants or flowers by bending and rolling thin sheets of silver. In his *The Lovers*, from ca. 1490 (in the Rosenwald Collection at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC), on the framing arch above the lovers, there are leaves that look quite similar to the flower next to the monster.⁴³

40. Kramer and Sprenger, *Malleus Maleficarum*, 43–47.

41. See Miles, *Carnal Knowing*; Elliott, *Fallen Bodies*; Stephens, *Demon Lovers*; Broedel, *Malleus Maleficarum and the Construction of Witchcraft, Theology and Popular Belief*.

42. Grotefend, *Taschenbuch der Zeitrechnung*, 15; Lange, *Der Papstesel*, 19, gives January 11 as the beginning of Aquarius.

43. For a full discussion of the attribution of the Roman monster to Wenzel von Olmütz, see Lange, *Der Papstesel*, 5–7.

Iconography of Papal Authority

Of greater significance are four elements in the background whose meanings are directly interrelated: the Castel Sant'Angelo, the cross-keys banner, the Tor di Nona, and the inscription "ROMA CAPVT MVNDI." Each of these represents an aspect of the temporal or secular authority of the papacy.

The papal fortress, Castel Sant'Angelo, located at the bend of the Tiber near the modern Vatican, began as Emperor Hadrian's mausoleum.⁴⁴ It became a burial place for Roman emperors, including Antoninus Pius, Marcus Aurelius, and Commodus, among others. As early as the late third century it was modified to serve as a fortress. The early form of the mausoleum was a square foundation upon which were built three cylinders of diminishing diameters (rather like a wedding cake). Hadrian's mole served as the papal fortress throughout the early Middle Ages. Unfortunately, like other ancient Roman monuments, it also served as a source of construction materials for medieval builders. For a time, it came under the control of powerful Roman baronial families, but with the Orsini pope Nicholas III (1277–80), the papacy regained full control of the fortress. From then on it stood both as the pope's stronghold and as a symbol of his temporal power.⁴⁵ In 1379, a popular riot badly damaged the medieval structure, necessitating a thorough reconstruction.

The restoration/reconstruction began under the papacy of Boniface IX (1389–1404), who actually forbade the removal of construction material under threat of excommunication. His architects set aside the appearance of the original tomb in order to construct a state-of-the-art Renaissance castle consistent with fifteenth-century military engineering. Nicholas V (1447–55) continued the work begun by Boniface. He ordered the construction of three defensive towers on top of the square base of the original mole. Nicholas was also the first pope to build a residential apartment within the castle.⁴⁶ Pope Alexander VI (1492–1503) further improved the bulwark by adding a moat, building polygonal towers around the round bastions of Nicholas V, creating a new residence within the fortification, and commissioning Antonio da Sangallo the Elder to fashion a massive tower at the entrance to the castle at the end of the bridge over the Tiber.⁴⁷ This building campaign took place from 1492 to 1495.

44. Construction on the mole began ca. AD 130.

45. Giustozzi, *Castel Sant'Angelo*, 39.

46. Ibid., 41.

47. Ibid., 43, 81. See also Lange, *Der Papstesel*, 28–29. Von Olmütz's pictorial source represents the massive crenelated central tower of Boniface IX as well as the round corner towers of Nicholas V, with, however,

As a Renaissance ruler struggling against other competing princes to maintain and expand his territorial hegemony, the pope needed a fortified residence. The Castel Sant'Angelo served this purpose. Here he sought refuge when attacked; here he safeguarded his treasury; and here he detained recalcitrant cardinals. The massive castle not only dominated the approach to St. Peter's, it stood as the single most powerful symbol of the temporal authority of the papacy.

In von Olmütz's engraving, an oversized flagpole projects atop the castle, from which flows a gigantic cross-keys banner, the traditional symbol of the pope's claim to hold the "power of the keys." This doctrine is the single most important justification for the power and authority of the papacy—both spiritual and secular. It is based upon Matthew 16:18–19, where Jesus says to Peter, "And I say to thee: That thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven. And whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth, it shall be bound also in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, it shall be loosed also in heaven."

Throughout the Middle Ages, various popes elaborated upon the meaning of this passage, articulating a coherent argument for papal primacy. One of the earliest and most influential explicators was Pope Leo I (440–461). He described the power of the pope with the explanatory formula *indignus haeres beati Petri*, that is, the pope is the "unworthy heir of St. Peter." Implicit in this notion are two essential concepts. First, it contends that the pope receives his authority directly from St. Peter, not mitigated (and potentially attenuated) by inheritance through a predecessor pope. By implication the power of the pope is equal to the power of St. Peter. Indeed, the pope's powers are also equal to those of Christ, for "Christ's powers [are] the same as Petrine powers, and these again [are] identifiable with papal powers."⁴⁸ The second implication of Leo's formula is that the pope's authority is independent of the personal worthiness of any single pope. Peter indeed merited the plenary powers that Christ gave

artistic license. Pope Nicholas built three towers, leaving the remains of the Roman mausoleum at the southwest corner undisturbed. Von Olmütz's engraving shows a round tower at this location. Presumably, the model for the original representation was a rendering of the structure that predated Alexander's building project.

48. Ullmann, *History of Political Thought*, 28.

him, but successor popes receive their powers as heirs of Peter and not because of their own merit.⁴⁹

Another important corollary to the power of the keys doctrine is the notion that the authority of the pope takes precedence over that of a king or an emperor. This position is in turn based on several assumptions: Just as the soul is superior to and should rule the corporeal, temporal body, so the clergy are to rule the laity, and the pope is to give direction to kings and to the emperor. Pope Gelasius I (492–496), for example, argued that the pope’s power of binding and loosing was an unrestricted power; it was the duty of the emperor to subject his rulings to ecclesiastical officers.⁵⁰ Quoting Gelasius: “In partaking of the heavenly sacraments, when they are properly dispensed, you [the emperor] recognize that you ought to be obedient to the religious orders rather than rule them.”⁵¹ He also argued that there was a qualitative difference between the pope’s ultimate authority (*auctoritas*) and the emperor’s mere executive power (*potestas*). *Authority* “shaped things creatively and in a binding manner” while *power* executed what authority had laid down.⁵²

Gregory VII (1073–85), in the great Investiture Controversy with Emperor Henry IV, further expanded papal preeminence over secular rulers; his ideas are contained in the document known as *Dictatus papae*. It states, for example, “¶9. That the Pope is the only one whose feet are to be kissed by all princes. . . . ¶12. That he [the pope] may depose Emperors. . . . ¶19. The he [the pope] himself may be judged by no one. . . . ¶23. That the Roman pontiff, if canonically ordained, is undoubtedly sanctified by the merits of St. Peter. . . . ¶26. That he should not be considered as Catholic who is not in conformity with the Roman Church.”⁵³

With the papacy of Innocent III (1198–1216), the political implications of the power of the keys reached their zenith. In his coronation sermon, Innocent described himself as “the Vicar of Jesus Christ, the successor of Peter,” and as “the intermediary between God and man: beneath God, above man: less than God, more than man.”⁵⁴ In sum, he claimed limitless jurisdiction in judging temporal affairs. He used this authority to direct the course of impe-

49. Ibid., 24–29; Leo the Great, *Letters and Sermons*, 117, quoted in Tierney, *Middle Ages*, 1:50–51.

50. Ullmann, *History of Political Thought*, 41.

51. Mirbt and Aland, *Quellen zur Geschichte des Papsttums*, 85–86, quoted in Cantor, *Medieval World*, 96.

52. Ullmann, *History of Political Thought*, 41.

53. Ehler and Morrall, *Church and State*, 44.

54. Quoted in Cassell, *Monarchia Controversy*, 10. See also Southern, *Western Society and the Church*, 105.

rial politics, ultimately crowning Frederick II as emperor. He forbade King Philip Augustus of France to marry for a third time and forced him to reconcile with his first wife. And, through interdict and excommunication, he forced King John of England to accept the papacy as the feudal overlord of England and Ireland.⁵⁵ These are just a few examples of Innocent's many feats of political intimidation, always reinforced with the threat of closing the gates of heaven against those who dared to resist his will.

While later popes were not as successful as Innocent III in asserting their secular authority as an extension of the power of the keys, the doctrine and the papal claim of authority that it made possible continued into the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The Avignonese papacy (1305–78) and the Great Schism (1378–1415) may have diminished the ability of the pope to play kingmaker on the world stage, but Renaissance pontiffs were still deeply involved in secular affairs, especially in their efforts to reassert their position in Italy.

The cross-keys banner was a profound and universally understood emblem of papal authority. A symbol that would have been equally well understood in Rome, but probably less well understood outside of the city, was the crenelated tower—the Tor di Nona—that stands to the right of von Olmütz's monster. In the fifteenth century, this tower house served as the papal prison, infamous for its torture room and dungeon.⁵⁶ Here brawlers and counterfeiterers as well as clerics and bureaucrats who fell afoul of the pope received punishment. In fact, capital punishments were known to have taken place at the Tor di Nona. In 1496, the prison would have had especially grim associations because the prisoners drowned in their cells when the deluge overtook the city. While the cross-keys may have symbolized the authority of the pope from a doctrinal point of view, the Tor di Nona was a local symbol of papal power. Together, the Castel Sant'Angelo and the Tor di Nona made a tangible statement of the temporal jurisdiction of the pope as one approached St. Peter's.

The fourth political symbol in the von Olmütz engraving is the inscription at the top of the picture: "ROMA CAPVT MVNDI" ("Rome, head of the world"). On a literal level, this phrase further identifies the location of the monster as the city of Rome; however, there is a deeper meaning in this

55. Cassell, *Monarchia Controversy*, 10–11.

56. Reumont, *Geschichte der Stadt Rom*, 3.1:444; Lange, *Der Papstesel*, 30.

adage. In fact, the phrase is an incomplete quotation of the leonine hexameter “Roma caput mundi regit orbis frena rotundi” (“Rome, head of the world, holds the reins of the globe”), which Holy Roman Emperors had used throughout the Middle Ages as a reference to the relationship between the secular, political authority of the emperor and the city of Rome. As far back as Carolingian and Ottonian times, poets used “Roma caput mundi” and “Roma caput mundi regit orbis frena rotundi” as expressions for the secular authority of the emperor.⁵⁷ In fact, the phrase decorated many imperial seals, coins, and insignia. For example, at the time of Otto III (983–1002) the phrase adorned the imperial crown and sash. Emperor Conrad II (1024–39), or more likely his chaplain Wipo, used the full expression as an encircling inscription on the imperial seal or golden bull to emphasize the Roman character of his governing authority.⁵⁸ Other emperors who used this expression on their seals included Frederick I Barbarossa (1155–90), Henry VI (1190–97), Frederick II (1212–50), Louis IV (1314–47), Charles IV (1347–78), Sigismund (1410–37), and Frederick III (1440–93).⁵⁹ Frederick I, Philip II (1198–1208), and Frederick II also used the expression on imperial coinage. Frederick Barbarossa especially emphasized the association of his imperial governing authority with his Roman title and the city of Rome. He said, for example, “For as I am called and am [indeed] Roman emperor by divine ordinance, I would be thus playing the role of some sort of despot and would use and bear the name in vain, without the true role, were the power over the city of Rome to be snatched from our hands.”⁶⁰

Some viewers might have taken the “Roma caput mundi” literally, as a reference to the city of Rome, but others would certainly have understood it as referring to the emperor’s claim that imperial authority was based upon the Roman *imperium*, which came, at least in theory, from the people of Rome. The juxtaposition of this three-word expression with the obvious signs of papal authority stands as a clear allusion to the great medieval hegemonic struggle between the pope and the emperor over the pope’s claim that he had

57. Lange, *Der Papstesel*, 54.

58. *Ibid.*

59. Ewald, *Siegelkunde*, table 24, items 8 and 12, table 25, items 3 and 6; Posse, *Die Siegel der deutschen Kaiser und Könige*, 2:9, table 16, items 1 and 2; and 12, table 24, items 1 and 2

60. Otto von Freising, *Die Taten Friedrichs*, 588: “Nam cum divina ordinatione ego Romanus imperator et dicar et sim, speciem tantum dominantis effingo et inane utique porto nomen ac sine re, si urbis Romae de manu nostra potestas fuerit excussa.” For “Roma caput mundi” as a coin inscription, see Menadier, *Die Aachener Münzen*, available with the medieval coin collection at the Münzkabinett of the Bodemuseum, Berlin.

the power to guide the course of secular politics and to create and depose emperors. Through powerful symbols, the illustration challenges the pope's claims to temporal jurisdiction. For much of the Middle Ages, the chief buttresses for these claims were the document known as the Donation of Constantine and the political theory known as *translatio imperii*. An understanding of these political ideologies is essential for interpreting the political content of von Olmütz's image of the Roman monster.

The Donation of Constantine

The *Constitutum Constantini* or Donation of Constantine is arguably one of the most famous forgeries in western history. Concocted in Rome in the mid-eighth century, it draws on the fifth-century *Legenda sancti Silvestri*, which tells of the conversion of Constantine to Christianity.⁶¹ In the Donation, Constantine first delivers an extensive confession of faith. He then states that, out of gratitude for Pope Sylvester's having cured him of leprosy, he grants to Pope Sylvester and his successors supremacy over Antioch, Alexandria, Constantinople, and Jerusalem as well as "over all the Churches of God throughout the whole world"; the imperial Lateran palace; the imperial insignia (crown, shoulder band, purple cloak, crimson tunic, scepters, spears, standards, banners, and imperial decorations); the papal tiara; and the "city of Rome and all the provinces, districts and cities of Italy and the Western regions."⁶²

Current scholarship holds that the Donation of Constantine was originally merely a "literary fiction" or a "hagiographical legend."⁶³ By the late eleventh century, however, papal partisans were using it to argue for the pope's sovereignty over the Papal States and for his autonomy from the emperor. In contrast to others, Innocent III recognized that the Donation could be interpreted to mean that the pope's sovereignty and privileges derived from the emperor! He therefore intentionally centered his jurisdictional claims on Matthew 28:18 ("All power is given to me [Jesus] in heaven and in earth.")⁶⁴ Still, Gregory IX (1227–41) was quite willing to use the Donation in his conflict with Frederick II, quoting it as proof of acknowledgment by the secular

61. "[T]he language of the Donation seems to point to the papal chancellery as the place of its origin, and the pontificate of Paul I (757–767) as the most probable time [of its origin]." See Valla, *Treatise . . . on the Donation of Constantine*, trans. Coleman, 7.

62. Ehler and Morrall, *Church and State*, 19–22.

63. John van Engen, "Donation of Constantine," in *DMA*, 4:258.

64. Cassell, *Monarchia Controversy*, 9.

power that “as the Prince of the Apostles governed the empire of priesthood and souls in the whole world, so he should also reign over material and corporeal affairs throughout the whole world.”⁶⁵ Innocent IX (1243–54) reinterpreted Constantine’s grant as a “restitution” of the sovereignty that God originally invested in the pontiff. Thereafter popes and their lawyers made extensive reference to the Donation “particularly on behalf of the papacy’s temporal sovereignty.”⁶⁶ In 1440, the humanist Lorenzo Valla, in his *On the False Donation of Constantine*, definitively exposed the document as a forgery, though his explication was not widely published until the sixteenth century.

Closely related to the Donation of Constantine was another important argument for papal temporal authority, the *translatio imperii* (translation of the Empire). This teaching brought together the fact of Leo III’s coronation of Charlemagne in AD 800 with the implications of the Donation, interpreting them in support of papal power. Simply put, the argument was that just as Leo III had made Charlemagne into an emperor, so later popes could both make and unmake emperors. Emperor Henry IV and Pope Gregory VII argued over this claim, but without specifically mentioning the theory of the *translatio imperii*. In the *Dictatus papae*, Gregory asserted, “¶12. That he [the pope] may depose Emperors.”⁶⁷ In contrast, Henry IV wrote in a letter to his German bishops, “He [Gregory VII] also endeavored to deprive me whom God called to the kingdom . . . of my royal power; this he did because he saw that I wanted to hold my rule from God and not from him.”⁶⁸ Likewise, Frederick I Barbarossa and Pope Adrian IV clashed over the same issue, but again without making specific reference to the translation of the Empire. In Frederick’s “Circular Letter on the Imperial Power,” he denounced the pope for sending him a message “that we [Frederick I] should always keep before the eyes of our mind how the lord Pope conferred upon us the distinction of the Imperial crown.”⁶⁹

The actual theory, explicitly stated as such, probably originated during Pope Alexander III’s struggles with Frederick I Barbarossa in the 1160s. However, the *translatio imperii* received its most complete explication in Pope Innocent III’s letter to Duke Berthold of Zähringen, which entered canon

65. Quoted in Morrall, *Political Thought in Medieval Times*, 84.

66. John van Engen, “Donation of Constantine,” in *DMA*, 4:259.

67. Ehler and Morrall, *Church and State*, 44.

68. *Ibid.*, 46.

69. *Ibid.*, 62.

law as the decretal *Venerabilem fratrem* (March 1202).⁷⁰ In this, Innocent conceded that the electors have the right to elect the king of Germany, but he contended that this authority resulted from the transfer of “the Roman Empire from the Greeks to the Germans in the person of Charlemagne” when Pope Leo III crowned him. Further, Innocent stated, “the right and authority to examine the person elected king—who is to be promoted to the office of Emperor—belongs to us [Innocent].” If the pope found the candidate unworthy, he could refuse to recognize the election. Also, should the electors be divided in selecting a king, Innocent claimed that the pope could “favour, after due warning and adequate waiting, one of the two parties” and crown him emperor.⁷¹ Clearly, the issue of the origins of secular sovereignty in medieval Europe was both complex and contentious.

The von Olmütz engraving addresses papal claims to secular authority by using four powerful symbols to allude to four different but related perspectives—theological (cross-keys banner), military (Castel Sant’Angelo), penal (Tor di Nona), and political (“Roma caput mundi”). In conjunction with folkloric images that suggest ridicule, foolishness, false belief, pestilence, and demonism, the message of the engraving is a scornful denunciation of papal claims to secular authority. With this understanding of the symbolism of the von Olmütz monster, one must next consider who authored this political satire.

The argument that von Olmütz worked from an Italian copy rather than creating his own original picture based upon written or oral knowledge seems quite persuasive. First, while the Tor di Nona would have been a powerful symbol to Italians, it would have been meaningless to most northern European viewers. It is therefore unlikely that a Moravian would have included this item in a work made for a northern audience. Also, the von Olmütz copy has orthographic infelicities that suggest that someone who did not know Italian was copying an Italian inscription: Castel Sant’Angelo is rendered “Castel-sacno”; Tevere is spelled “Tevfrf”; and Tor di Nona is spelled “Tofedinona”⁷² (see fig. 1). Von Olmütz, or his workshop, must have copied an Italian original that contained the symbolic elements in the setting, most likely adding only

70. Ibid., 71–72; Freed, “Translation of Empire,” in *DMA*, 12:143.

71. Ehler and Morrall, *Church and State*, 72. For a thorough discussion of the *translatio imperii*, see Goetz, *Translatio imperii*.

72. Lange, *Der Papstesel*, 6.

the “W” at the bottom of the image and the trademark flower of a goldsmith’s pattern book.

It appears that someone in Italy, in fact, probably someone in Rome, took a copy of the monster that had been made for purposes of popular piety (to illustrate a divine portent) and added to it a symbol-laden setting that turned it into a pasquinade-like satire against the papacy. This latter version then made its way to Moravia where von Olmütz copied it. The most likely author of von Olmütz’s original was either a member of the Roman Waldensian community or a member of the Bohemian Brethren visiting the Waldensians in Rome. The politicized image was then probably transported to Moravia via contacts between the Waldensians and the Brethren. Who, then, were the Waldensians, who were the Bohemian Brethren, and what evidence points to their role in the production of the Roman monster as a political pasquinade?

The Waldensians

The Waldensian movement traces its origins to a wealthy merchant of Lyons named Vaudès⁷³ who, in the late twelfth century, experienced a religious conversion, gave away his money, became a beggar, and began trying to live a life consistent with the teachings of Jesus in the Gospels. Self-educated in matters of religion, he hired priests to translate various books of the Bible and patristic writings into the vernacular that he could read. His ministry consisted of setting an example of moral rigor and preaching against sin. He soon attracted followers who interpreted his antimaterialistic lifestyle as a condemnation of clerical wealth and corruption. His archbishop ordered him to stop his begging and preaching. In an effort to win papal recognition for his efforts at religious renewal, he journeyed to the Third Lateran Council in Rome in 1179. Pope Alexander III decreed that Vaudès and his followers (called the Poor of Lyons) could preach only if their local clergy authorized them to do so. Back in Lyons, Vaudès continued to preach despite the archbishop’s proscription. This led to his excommunication and expulsion from Lyons. His movement was thereafter driven underground. Nevertheless, the Poor of Lyons continued to gain adherents and spread throughout southern France and northern Italy. In 1184, Pope Lucius III anathematized them as schismatics; at the Fourth Lateran Council, they were again condemned but

73. For the background to the spelling of Vaudès, see Audisio, *Waldensian Dissent*, 7–9.

this time as heretics.⁷⁴ It then fell to the Holy Office of the Inquisition to try to stamp out the movement.

Three separate kinds of sources provide documentary evidence about the group: confessions from suspects questioned before the Inquisition; descriptions from inquisitors written to instruct other clergy; and a small number of Waldensian pious and inspirational writings, mostly dating from the fourteenth to the early sixteenth centuries. Of this Waldensian corpus, the most famous is a poem known as “Nobla Leyçon” (“Noble Lesson”), which, in its present form, was likely written in the fifteenth century.⁷⁵

As the movement spread, the Poor of Lyons came to be described as consisting of two groups: the Ultramontane Poor and Poor of Lombardy, the latter group being somewhat more radical in its condemnation of traditional Catholicism.⁷⁶ But this distinction became blurred as the movement spread out of the original areas of Provence, Dauphiné, Savoy, and Piedmont into Aragon, Lorraine, Germany, Austria, Bohemia, Moravia, and southern Italy. In 1315 one captured Waldensian claimed that there were more than eighty thousand Waldensians in Austria and an “infinite number” in Bohemia and Moravia.⁷⁷ The Inquisition was successful in rooting them out from the main Mediterranean urban centers, but they remained strong in remote Alpine valleys, in Germany/Austria, and along the German-Slavic frontier. During the period of 1335 to 1355, some four thousand Waldensians were brought before the Inquisition in Bohemia, and some two hundred were burned at the stake.⁷⁸ In Italy, by the fifteenth century, there were Waldensians in Romagna, Umbria (especially around Spoleto), Calabria, Apulia, and the city of Rome.⁷⁹

The leaders of the movement were known as *barbes* or *magistri*. Literate and often rather well educated, they posed as merchants so as to be free to travel from region to region to meet clandestinely with their followers, many of whom came from the peasantry or the urban underclass. The *barbes* were the transmitters of an essentially oral culture. While this circumstance no doubt led to local variations, it is nevertheless possible to summarize certain shared

74. Stephens, *Waldensian Story*, 37; Lerner, “Waldensians,” in *DMA*, 12:508–13.

75. Audisio, *Waldensian Dissent*, 153. See also Audisio, “Were the Waldensians More Literate Than Their Contemporaries?”; Brenon, “Waldensian Books”; Lambert, *Medieval Heresy*, 162–63.

76. Wakefield and Evans, *Heresies of the High Middle Ages*, 345–46.

77. Lerner, “Waldensians,” in *DMA*, 12:512.

78. *Ibid.*, Lerner, “A Case of Religious Counter-Culture,” 241–42, 247.

79. Lambert, *Medieval Heresy*, 153; Stephens, *Waldensian Story*, 58–59, 81; Audisio, *Waldensian Dissent*, 195; Leff, *Heresy in the Later Middle Ages*, 2:483.

practices and beliefs: lay preaching in private to fellow believers, a vow of poverty for the *barbes*, literal biblicism without elaborate interpretation, heavy reliance on the Gospels, avoidance of falsehood consistent with Matthew 5:37, avoidance of swearing of oaths, denial of the existence of purgatory, lay hearing of confession and granting of absolution, validity of sacraments dependent upon morality of clergy (Donatism), rejection of the death penalty, female administration of the Eucharist, rejection of invocation of saints, and rejection of the authority of the pope and the doctrine of the power of the keys.⁸⁰

This last point requires further elucidation. Comments of inquisitors, confessions from accused Waldensians, and passages from the corpus of Waldensian writings all document a distinctive view of ecclesiastical history. The Waldensians believed that when Emperor Constantine made his “donation” to Pope Sylvester, the Roman Church embraced secular authority and riches and thereby became corrupt. At that point the pope lost his authority over the church. As the “Nobla Leyçon” says, “But I dare say, for it happens to be true, that all the popes there have been since Sylvester until the present one, and all the cardinals, and all the bishops and all the priests, all of these together do not have enough power to be able to forgive a single mortal sin: God alone can forgive, since no-one else can do so.”⁸¹

This attitude towards the pope’s temporal authority and the Donation of Constantine appears in a statement that a suspected Waldensian made before the Inquisition. Of course, one would suspect that, to keep from making matters worse, the accused would try to keep his confession as vague as possible so as to avoid self-incrimination. Appearing before the Inquisition in the late fifteenth century, an accused Waldensian, after torture, said that he “remembered his aunt’s telling him long ago how, since some Pope he did not know of, none of Peter’s successors had lived his life [*sic*] or received his [Peter’s] power.”⁸² In other words, since Pope Sylvester, the papacy had lost its purity and power.

Yet another piece of evidence that documents the Waldensian stance regarding the Donation of Constantine comes from the preacher Friedrich

80. Audisio, *Waldensian Dissent*, 47–56; Lerner, “A Case of Religious Counter-Culture,” 240–241; Todd, *Books of the Vaudois*, 81, 83.

81. Audisio, *Waldensian Dissent*, 153; Herzog, *Die romanischen Waldenser*, 456. See also Stephens, *Waldensian Story*, 86; Davis, “Rome and Babylon in Dante,” 28.

82. Cameron, *Reformation of the Heretics*, 77. In contrast with Biller, Molnár, Audisio, and Leff, Cameron asserts that the notion that the papacy lost its purity and power at the time of Pope Sylvester was an “inquisitorial cliché” that was not echoed by “most of the Vaudois.” See Biller, “Medieval Waldensians’ Construction of the Past,” 39–54.

Reiser. He was the son of a Waldensian merchant from Donauwörth. In the 1420s he moved to Switzerland and became an itinerant Waldensian preacher. Later he moved to Prague and served as a Hussite missionary. He became a Hussite bishop and led an effort to bring about a union of the Taborites and the Waldensians. His full episcopal title was “Fridericus, Dei gratia Episcopus fidelium in Romana Ecclesia donationem Constantini supernantium” (“Frederick, by God’s grace, bishop of the faithful in the Roman Church who reject Constantine’s donation”).⁸³

The many tracts and manuals that inquisitors and orthodox theologians wrote describing the “errors” of the Waldensians provide some of the most complete, albeit prejudicial, statements on the Waldensian attitude toward the secular power of the papacy.⁸⁴ For example, the inquisitor Moneta of Cremona wrote the following:

Excited by the poison of perfidy, the heretics determined to prove that the Roman pontiffs and the faithful were not the successors of Peter but of Constantine and that the church did not begin with Peter but with Constantine or, if you like with Sylvester. . . . [The] imperial power belonged to Rome right up to the time of Constantine, who assumed with insolence this succession and gave it over to Sylvester, who was the pope of the Roman church. . . . Sylvester, having accepted these [insignia of power] unjustly, possessed them himself also by rapine. This applies to all those who succeeded Sylvester, an[d] so they say the Roman pontiffs are not the successors of Peter but of Constantine.⁸⁵

Waldensians not only rejected the Donation of Constantine and the claims to papal secular authority that it supported, they also claimed that the Roman Church since the time of Sylvester had become the scarlet woman of the apocalypse, the whore of Babylon. They took this reference from the Book of Revelation, for the apocalypticism of ancient Christianity resonated well with their own treatment throughout the late Middle Ages. The Book of Revelation was addressed to the besieged Christians of Asia Minor, who faced

83. Leff, *Heresy in the Later Middle Ages*, 2:470–71; Audisio, *Waldensian Dissent*, 83; Lambert, *Medieval Heresy*, 329; Lerner, “A Case of Religious Counter-Culture,” 246–47; Cameron, *Waldenses*, 147–48; Molnár, *Challenge to Constantinianism*, 72n10.

84. For example, Sacconi, *Summa de Catharis et Pauperibus de Lugduno* (Summa on the Cathars and the Poor of Lyons), in Wakefield and Evans, *Heresies of the High Middle Ages*, 329; Anonymous of Passau, in Leff, *Heresy in the Later Middle Ages*, 2:458–59; Master Jacob of Petrikau, in *ibid.*, 2:462; Moneta da Cremona, *Adversus Catharos et Valdenses*, in Molnár, *Challenge to Constantinianism*, 50–51.

85. Molnár, *Challenge to Constantinianism*, 50–51.

torture and execution if they refused to worship *Dea Roma*, the cult of the goddess of Rome, and the cult of the deified emperor. The author (allegedly St. John the Evangelist) told the early Christians that while they may live in a hopelessly wicked age in which the demonic agents of Rome torture and kill the righteous, nevertheless this evil would soon come to an end through God's direct intervention.⁸⁶ The Book of Revelation speaks through highly symbolic "picture language" that its ancient readers understood but that is "not much concerned with logic, consistency, and precision."⁸⁷

One of the most powerful of these images is the whore of Babylon—the harlot seated upon many waters (Rev. 17:1), the harlot drunk with the blood of the saints (Rev. 17:6), or the harlot seated on seven hills (Rev. 17:9). This is symbolic code language for Rome and the Roman religious and political persecution of the saints. In fact, "Rome" has at least three separate but often conflated meanings in the Book of Revelation—*Dea Roma*, the pagan goddess; *Roma aeterna*, the city of Rome and the associated political dogma of eternal hegemony; and the Roman Empire, whose emperor controlled the destinies of the Christian communities.⁸⁸ Symbolically, "Babylon" and the "whore of Babylon" stand for this complex and interrelated cluster of meanings.

The Waldensians also used symbolic language, but when they referred to Rome they meant *Roma ecclesia*, the church made corrupt by papal claims to secular authority founded on the Donation of Constantine. They charged that the "Roman Church is the church of the wicked, the beast and the harlot which are described in the Apocalypse."⁸⁹ The Waldensian conflation of the Roman Church with the whore of Babylon is a direct parallel to the conflation of Rome with the whore of Babylon in the Book of Revelation.

The Waldensians shared another characteristic with the author of Revelation—an apocalyptic worldview. They believed that the end of the world was imminent, that evil would soon be overcome by divine goodness. This attitude is clear in the "Nobla Leyçon":

86. *Interpreter's Bible*, 12:347.

87. *Ibid.*, 12:490.

88. *Ibid.*, 12:489.

89. Sacconi, *Summa de Catharis*, in Wakefield and Evans, *Heresies of the High Middle Ages*, 345–346. See also Anonymous of Passau, in Leff, *Heresy in the Later Middle Ages*, 2:459; pseudo David of Augsburg, in *ibid.*, 455–58; Alberto de' Capitatei, Archdeacon of Cremona and papal legate, in Todd, *Books of the Vaudois*, 111–12; Stephen of Bourbon, Dominican at Lyons, in Wakefield and Evans, *Heresies of the High Middle Ages*, 349; Stephens, *Waldensian Story*, 40–42.

O brethren, listen to a noble lesson:
 We must often watch and be in prayer,
 For we see this world near its final stage;
 Most anxious should we be to do good works
 For we see this world approaching its end. . . .
 Daily we see the signs fulfilled,
 Increasing evil and diminishing good.⁹⁰

The Waldensians of the late fifteenth century had good reason to identify with the persecuted Christians of the late first century. From the thirteenth through the fifteenth centuries they had been hauled before the Inquisition, tortured, and executed. In 1488 they became the victims of a brutal crusade when Pope Innocent VIII issued a bull, *Id nostri cordis* (April 1487), authorizing the archdeacon of Cremona, Alberto Cattaneo, to undertake a crusade in Dauphiné, Savoy, and Piedmont to “crush them [Waldensians] like venomous asps.”⁹¹ Cattaneo’s Dauphinois soldiers easily overpowered the Waldensian peasants; regardless of age or sex they were “hanged, run through with swords, or thrown headlong from precipices in the mountains.”⁹² Altogether some 160 Waldensian men, women, and children of Dauphiné met violent deaths, and many others fled to join their sectarian coreligionists in Provence, Piedmont, and in southern Italy.

What, then, is the connection between the Roman Waldensians and the illustration of the Roman monster as an antipapal pasquinade? As noted above, the setting for the monster presents symbols of the pope’s temporal power together with a demonic image having connotative meanings of ridicule, defamation, foolishness, false belief, and pestilence—a clear symbolic denunciation of the pope’s claims to secular authority. This message is entirely consistent with the Waldensian view that after accepting the Donation of Constantine, the papacy was corrupted and lost its authority because of its temporal, secular claims.

Also, the Waldensians believed that *Roma ecclesia* was the whore of Babylon, the apocalyptic symbol for Rome taken from the Book of Revelation.⁹³

90. Stephens, *Waldensian Story*, 86.

91. *Ibid.*, 105.

92. Cameron, *Waldenses*, 197.

93. Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk*, 170–74. In the early sixteenth century, when artists and book illustrators depicted the whore of Babylon for the Lutheran Reformation, they actually showed a woman riding a seven-headed beast.

It seems probable that the Waldensians were the ones who refashioned an existing image into a representation of Rome after the fall. The demon stands dominating the floodwaters of the devastated city, creating an illustration of Babylon (viz. Rome) as described by the angel in Revelation 18:2, “And he [the angel] cried out with a strong voice, saying: Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen; and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every unclean spirit.” The demonic monster standing on the banks of the Tiber symbolizes fallen Babylon as the “habitation of devils.”

Utilizing the figure of an animal to make a moral or religious point is typical of Waldensian piety. One of the tracts in the small Waldensian corpus that has survived is the *De la propiota de las animanzas*, a bestiary that offers moral and religious meditations based on the presumed nature, image, and properties of various animals.⁹⁴ While this work does not contain a meditation on the ass, it nevertheless documents the use of animal imagery associated with Waldensian piety.

Not only the animal imagery but also the antipapal and apocalyptic content of the Roman monster illustration suggests an association between it and the Waldensians. Further, the record of contacts between Waldensians and two Bohemian Brethren provides strong circumstantial reasons to suggest that the heretical community in Rome was responsible for the first politicized version of the monster. In 1498, two emissaries from the Bohemian Brethren visited the Roman Waldensians and returned to Bohemia, most likely taking the satiric illustration with them. This would explain why the only surviving copy of this version comes from a Moravian artist. To understand why these two individuals, Luke of Prague and Thomas of Landskron (also known as Thomas the German), went to Rome in 1498, it is necessary to look at the political and religious situation in Bohemia and at the chaotic events that transpired there following the execution of John Hus at the Council of Constance in 1415.

The Bohemian Brethren

Influenced by a native Czech reform tradition and by the writings of the English reformer, John Wyclif, Hus became a popular preacher at Prague's Bethlehem Chapel as well as a leader of the movement for Czech (vs. German) control of the University of Prague. Ultimately he became rector of the university. As a

94. Audisio, *Waldensian Dissent*, 153–54; Todd, *Books of the Vaudois*, 45–46.

preacher of moral reform among the clergy, Hus offended leading church officials; as a public defender of the ideas of John Wyclif, he suffered excommunication from the church. Though Hus continued to embrace many traditional teachings of Catholicism (seven sacraments, transubstantiation, purgatory, masses for the dead, intercession of saints), he nevertheless denounced the sale of indulgences, denied the authority of the papacy, defined the “church” as the community of the elect, and contended that both Pope Sylvester and the emperor erred in the Donation of Constantine.⁹⁵

For his offenses the Council of Constance saw fit to execute him by burning at the stake, in spite of the safe conduct that he had received from Emperor Sigismund. His execution resulted in a popular insurrection that soon turned into a Czech civil war. The contending factions included the Utraquists, the Party of the Four Articles, the Taborites, and the Adamites. The Utraquists, or Calixtines, principally demanded that the laity receive the cup (*calix*) in Communion. They wanted to remain within Roman Catholicism but called for moral reform of the clergy and sought recognition from Rome for their desire to commune in both kinds.

A 1420 compromise program, known as the Four Articles of Prague, called for the free preaching of the gospel; Communion in both kinds; abnegation of the church’s worldly authority and secularization of ecclesiastical wealth; and the punishment of public sins, especially the clerical sin of simony. While these ideas were common to most Hussites, they especially represented the ideas of a faction within the Utraquist movement.⁹⁶

A third group, the Taborites, stood clearly to the left of the Party of the Four Articles. It rejected belief in purgatory, endorsed baptism and Communion as the only sacraments, substituted consubstantiation for the doctrine of transubstantiation, called for a greatly simplified church ritual without elaborate clerical vestments, rejected the doctrine of apostolic succession, and envisioned the imminent Second Coming.

To the left of the Taborites stood the Adamites, a rationalistic, pantheistic group that denied the doctrine of the real presence in the Eucharist and

95. Kaminsky, *History of the Hussite Revolution*, 54. For a discussion of Hus’s trial and execution, see Fudge, *Trial of Jan Hus*.

96. Winfried Eberhard, “Hussites,” in *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, 2:279; Brock, *Political and Social Doctrines of the Unity of Czech Brethren*, 12.

treated Communion as a “purely commemorative act.” In 1421, the Taborites suppressed this group by force.⁹⁷

Emperor Sigismund, on behalf of the Roman Church, attempted to drive these various divisions back into Catholicism through military action. This external threat brought cohesion to the factions, and the Hussites succeeded in defeating crusades against them on four separate occasions. By 1431, therefore, the Council of Basel agreed to begin negotiations with them. These discussions eventually led to the agreement known as the Compactata (1433), a diplomatic victory for the council that granted little of the original Hussite program, other than the taking of Communion in both kinds. The Taborites rejected the Compactata and took up arms; the moderate Utraquist nobles joined with the Catholics to fight against the Taborites, defeating them at the Battle of Lipany (1434).

With the defeat of the Taborites, Emperor Sigismund returned to Prague, recognized as the king of Bohemia by both Roman Catholics and moderate Utraquists. But this peaceful situation was not to last. In 1437 Sigismund died. There followed an interregnum, the short reign of Ladislav of Austria (1439–57), the reign of the Czech George of Poděbrady (1459–71), warfare between King George and King Matthias Corvinus of Hungary (after Pope Pius II rejected the Compactata), and the rule of Vladislav II (1471–1516), the eldest son of the Polish king. The political instability of most of the fifteenth century led to a rise in the importance of the local nobility and to formal royal policies that fluctuated from toleration to suppression to benign neglect toward the contending religious divisions.

As noble prerogative waxed and royal authority waned, there emerged at the local level numerous regional sectarian groups that were dissatisfied with the accomplishments of Utraquism and that often enjoyed the patronage of like-minded nobles. These groups did not necessarily break with the Utraquist Church, but they put forward various radical ideas for further change. By far the most influential of all of these rural freethinkers was Peter Chelčický (ca. 1390–bef. 1467), a man who was probably a member of the south Bohemian gentry and early on was an adherent of the Taborite movement. He may, in fact, have been a Waldensian before the Hussite revolt. Largely self-taught, knowing only a minimal amount of Latin, he drew ideas from Hus and Wyclif, from Waldensianism, and most importantly, from the Czech Bible.⁹⁸

97. Brock, *Political and Social Doctrines of the Unity of Czech Brethren*, 13.

98. *Ibid.*, 25–69.

Chelčický taught that true Christians must live simple lives in strict conformity with the example of Christ and the apostles—lives of humility and patience, showing love to their enemies. He called for the total separation of church and state because he felt that the coercive power of the civil authority was unchristian. In practice, this meant refusing to hold a governmental office, take an oath, bear arms, support a military enterprise, or participate in a court of law. He called for establishing schools so that laymen could learn to read the Bible, but he was an anti-intellectual, highly suspicious of claims of superiority from university graduates.⁹⁹

Chelčický revealed an affinity to the Waldensians in his anti-Constantinianism. He wrote,

when he [Constantine], after many cruelties, wanted to glorify himself in Christ, he pushed himself into the Christian community along with his pagan lordship. And the poor priest [*scil.*, Silvester] who had hid before him in caves and forests received honor and imperial lordship from him and thus fell away from the faith. Hence, when this evil came to pass, a voice was heard saying, “Today poison has been poured into the Holy Church”—as though the faith were to cease on account of these two rich lords. . . . So from the time that the church and her doctors drank the poison, from that time the doctors have always declared that the church has two swords, and as the church has abandoned the commands of Christ and has stopped following him, she has become bloody and she renders evil for evil.¹⁰⁰

In his treatise *On the Triple Division of Society* he further wrote:

From then [the Donation of Constantine] on the power of the Roman Empire stood under the faith, and from that beginning the powers came in under the faith in other countries too. It is indeed known to us that Antichrist found all his strength in the Christian faith through the secular power, and that it was through this power that the Great Whore who sits on the Roman throne spread all her poison. For when power was accepted into the faith while still enjoying the pagan honors, goods, and rights that it had previously enjoyed in paganism, it in return endowed the priests with goods; so it falsely entered the faith itself, and it took away the priests’ faith with its property. . . . Furthermore, when that decked-out

99. Ibid., 99. For a discussion of Chelčický, see Atwood, *Theology of the Czech Brethren*, 133–51.

100. Quoted in Kaminsky, *History of the Hussite Revolution*, 392. See also Brock, *Political and Social Doctrines of the Unity of Czech Brethren*, 34, 45–47.

Whore had obtained all her power and fullness from secular power, she then in return, as was fitting to her shameless obscenity, began to kiss, love, and fondle that power. She blessed, flattered, forgave everything, made all the kings of the earth participants of all her pieties, and thus she fornicated with them all, tempted them, and always exalted power.¹⁰¹

Late in his life, Peter Chelčický received a visit from another dissatisfied Utraquist seeker, a man known as Brother Řehoř. He was a member of the minor gentry who also worked as a tailor. He had little education but did have some knowledge of Latin. He and his followers established contacts with a number of other small religious groups that had sprung up within the Utraquist Church. With the permission of George of Poděbrady, Řehoř and his followers settled (1458) in the village of Kunvald (Kunwald) in northeast Bohemia.¹⁰² This group took over Chelčický's political, social, and theological ideas. The founding of the Kunvald community marks the beginning of a new group, variously known as the *Unitas Fratrum*, the Bohemian Brethren, the Czech Brethren, the Unity of Czech Brethren, or simply the Unity.

The Unity believed that, after the Donation of Constantine, the church began a steady decline from apostolic perfection. They thought, however, that a small remnant of true Christians continued to exist (possibly among the Waldensians, or among the Greek or Russian Orthodox, or among the Nestorian Church in India!).¹⁰³ Also, they took from Chelčický a thorough condemnation of the state. The Brethren could not serve in government, wage war, take oaths, or sanction capital punishment. In sum, they were to disassociate themselves totally from entanglements with the state and attempt to live lives in complete conformity with the demands of the Gospels. Initially, they retained the doctrine of apostolic succession, but in 1467, at a meeting known as the Synod of Lhotka, they began choosing their own priests and confirming them in the name and authority of the Brotherhood.

These pious, hardworking sectaries attracted followers, not only from among the rustics, but also from tradesmen and even from nobles. During much of the reign of King Vladislav II (1471–ca. 1500) the Unity enjoyed relative peace and freedom. Given the weak position of the Bohemian monarchy,

101. Kaminsky, "Peter Chelčický: Treatises on Christianity and the Social Order," 1:145.

102. Brock, *Political and Social Doctrines of the Unity of the Czech Brethren*, 72–75.

103. Ibid., 78, 85. See also Hutton, *History of the Moravian Church*, 51; Schweinitz, *History of . . . the Unitas Fratrum*, 176. For a general discussion of the beliefs of the Unity, see Atwood, *Theology of the Czech Brethren*, 152–240.

the local nobility increased in relative authority. This meant that the Unity was safest when it had a sympathetic noble patron.

The presence of nobles and townsmen among their ranks, however, called into question the Unity's position on disengagement from civil authority. Noble patrons could hardly be asked to surrender their political authority, and townsmen needed to be able to swear oaths in order to become members of craft guilds or accept the position of alderman (town councilor) in the towns where they resided. The issue of civic engagement and swearing oaths eventually led the Old Brethren to divide into two factions—the Major Party and the Minor Party. The former, representing the interests of townsmen and nobles, wanted to modify strict adherence to Chelčický's ideals; the latter, identified with rural peasants, insisted on strict adherence to civic disengagement. In 1490 the Unity's governing body, the Inner Council, issued the Edict of Brandýs, which supported the Major Party's position: "If a Brother should be forced by civil authority, against his conscience, to accept any of these things [civil responsibilities], being unable to escape either through humble pleadings or in any other way, he should according to [our] counsel submit to the authorities in whatever is not against God."¹⁰⁴

This edict did not however solve the problem. In fact, for the next four years the Minor Party managed to gain control of the Inner Council. In 1496, the Major Party again took control. In that year, both parties agreed to meet in a conference at Chlumeč nad Cidlinou (Chlumetz an der Cidlina) (May 23, 1496), for the purpose of reconciling differences. By this time a clear leader had emerged within the Major Party, Brother Luke of Prague.

Born in Prague in 1458, he took his bachelor of arts at the University of Prague in 1481. Well educated in the classics, scripture, patristics, and the writings of medieval scholastics, he was an able spokesman for the Major Party. Early in his education he had embraced the ideas of Peter Chelčický; he joined the Unity around 1481 or 1482.¹⁰⁵ He became pastor to the Brethren at Mladá Boleslav (Jung-Bunzlau, in north-central Bohemia), and in 1500 the Major Party elected him as a bishop of the Unity.¹⁰⁶

104. Brock, *Political and Social Doctrines of the Unity of Czech Brethren*, 128. On the Minor Party and the schism between the two parties, see Atwood, *Theology of the Czech Brethren*, 197–206; Peschke, *Kirche und Welt in der Theologie der Böhmischesen Brüder*, 120–46.

105. Brock, *Political and Social Doctrines of the Unity of Czech Brethren*, 105. See also Zeman, *Anabaptists and the Czech Brethren*, 200–203. For a discussion of the contributions of Luke of Prague to the Unity, see Atwood, *Theology of the, Czech Brethren*, 189–240.

106. Brock, *Political and Social Doctrines of the Unity of Czech Brethren*, 242n3. For a biography of Luke of

Under his leadership the Unity moved away from Chelčický's adamant opposition to civic engagement and gave up the "dream of a classless, nonviolent federation of peasant communities."¹⁰⁷ Brother Luke argued for a qualified acceptance of the existing social structure. He accepted the power of the state, the jurisdiction of law courts, the swearing of oaths, and the legitimacy of the use of force, whether for punishment or for war. He made room for trade, commerce, and even book learning within the piety of the Brethren. He emphasized honesty in business relations, integrity in public service, respect for governmental authority, charity towards the unfortunate, and piety in private life.¹⁰⁸ The state's jurisdiction, of course, must be limited to temporal matters and it must be properly constituted. Whereas Chelčický saw the story of the Donation of Constantine as a warning to Christians not to participate in activities connected with the state, Brother Luke interpreted the Donation as signifying a corruption only of the Roman Church, due to the "fusion of the secular and the spiritual spheres of life."¹⁰⁹ The state should not attempt to help enforce right belief, punish heretics, or impose Christianity on non-Christians. He called for a complete separation of church and state but this separation did not preclude Christians from taking a part in the life of the state; the "acceptance of worldly power, civil authority, was not equivalent to acceptance of worldly values."¹¹⁰

At the Conference of Chlumec, however, Brother Luke did not win over the Minor Party. In an attempt to reassure his opponents, he emphasized that the Major Party was against all forms of religious persecution by the secular authority, and he stated that "they [the Major Party] were still one, therefore, with the Minor Party in condemning Sylvester for his alliance with Constantine."¹¹¹ Brother Luke's comments at Chlumec show that he hoped to find some common ground with the Minor Party in opposition to the pope's claims to secular authority while at the same time rejecting many of their criticisms. Two years after the meeting at Chlumec, he and a companion journeyed to northern Italy and to Rome to meet with the Waldensians. This trip must be understood in the context of the struggle between the two factions of the

Prague, see Crews, "Luke of Prague," 21–54.

107. Brock, *Political and Social Doctrines of the Unity of Czech Brethren*, 239.

108. Ibid.

109. Ibid., 188.

110. Ibid., 172.

111. Ibid., 174.

Unity and Brother Luke's rejection of papal secular authority and his criticism of the Donation of Constantine.¹¹²

Accompanying Brother Luke to Italy was Brother Thomas of Landskron (Thomas the German), who may have once been a Waldensian himself.¹¹³ These men had three motives for their trip to northern Italy and Rome. In the recent controversy between the Major Party and the Minor Party the latter had praised the Waldensians for their strict adherence to the same political and social principles for which the Minor Party stood. The Brothers wanted to see if the Minor Party's contentions were accurate. Also, if the Waldensians, in fact, did follow a strict, simple, apostolic Christianity, shunning the baneful effects of the Donation of Constantine, then the emissaries wanted to establish relations with this community of primitive Christian believers. On two earlier occasions the Brethren had sought to find remnants of "apostolic" Christianity in distant lands, for, as they said, they desired "always to have communion with such people . . . not wishing to be schismatics and sectaries."¹¹⁴ Finally, the Brethren wanted to see Rome in person, as Jan Łasicki stated, "to see with their own eyes all that is said in the apocalypse about Rome."¹¹⁵

112. Müller, *Die deutschen Katechismen der Böhmisches Brüder*, 147, argues that Luke of Prague's trip to Italy in 1498 was made for the purpose of meeting with the Waldensians in their ancestral home to explain the Major Party's separation from the Minor Party in the context of an effort to distance the Major Party from connections with the Waldensians. This explanation, however, does not take into account continuing contacts between the Brethren and the Waldensians, as for example, those documented in 1512; Müller, *Geschichte der Böhmisches Brüder*, 1:370. Based on available information, it seems likely that Brother Luke wanted to explain the schism between the Major Party and the Minor Party to the Italian Waldensians precisely because of a close and continuing relationship between the Waldensians and Brethren. Later, when Brother Luke attempted to explain the Unity's position to King Vladislav in the face of systematic persecution, he tried to draw accurate distinctions between the Brethren and the Waldensians.

113. A member of the Major Party, in 1480 Thomas undertook a journey to Brandenburg, where he visited the Waldensians and, shortly thereafter, helped arrange for a group of them to emigrate to Moravia. The Brandenburg emigrants settled around Fulnek, in a German-speaking district. "It was from these communities, formerly forming the main German language group within the Unity, that the founders of the Moravian Church in the early eighteenth century originated." See Brock, *Political and Social Doctrines of the Unity of Czech Brethren*, 85–86n29. See also Müller, *Geschichte der Böhmisches Brüder*, 1:178, 180.

114. Brock, *Political and Social Doctrines of the Unity of Czech Brethren*, 141. On the division between the Major and Minor Parties and Luke of Prague's trip to Italy, see Molnár, "Die kleine und die grosse Partei der Brüderunität," 239–48.

115. Lange, *Der Papstesel*, 69; Müller, *Geschichte der Böhmisches Brüder*, 1:273–78; Goll, *Der Verkehr der Brüder mit den Waldensern*, 67–68, briefly discusses Luke of Prague's trip to Rome. See also Molnár, "Luc de Prague et les Vaudois d'Italie." Fortunately for the historian, the Unity had supporters who were keen to collect documents and reports that would tell the story of this sectarian movement. These included Jan Blahoslav (1523–71), the earliest historian of the Unity, who wrote *Summa quaedam brevissima collecta ex variis scriptis Fratrum, qui falso Waldenses vel Picardi vocantur, de eorundem Fratrum origine et actis* (1556). Joachim Camerarius the Elder (1500–1574), a sympathetic protestant scholar, a professor

With regard to the moral perfection of the Waldensians and their living the ideal of apostolic Christianity, the emissaries were disappointed. They found the northern Italian Waldensians “grievously afflicted with dissensions.”¹¹⁶ In Rome, the Brethren chided the Waldensians for making their criticisms of the papacy in secret rather than “publicly condemning public sins.”¹¹⁷ One of the Waldensians replied that he did not want to suffer the same fate as one who had cried out “non sic Peter” as the pope was being carried by in a litter. The critic was forthwith bound up in a sack and thrown into the Tiber. He said, “Here, you Bohemians, it is not allowed to speak the truth openly.” The Roman Waldensian further excused his behavior by citing the example of Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, who were also secret followers of Christ. Łasicki ends his narrative with the comment, “This, however, did not please the upstanding Brethren, and they returned home and related all to their followers.”¹¹⁸

The third reason for the Italian trip, namely, to see the signs of the apocalypse manifest in Rome, led Łasicki to include many specific comments that sound like direct quotes from the Brothers’ reports.¹¹⁹ For example, he states that the Brethren

saw that Rome was once situated on seven hills, now however has sunk down to the Tiber; . . . that it [Rome] is now largely destroyed and laid waste; that, however, because of its great size it is still designated by the angel as “great” (Babylon); . . . that its [Rome’s] dominion, at one time very great, wanes more and more; . . . that he [the pope] permits the children of God to kiss his feet, assumes superiority over kings, and guides everything on the Christian globe according to his will. He misuses the

at Leipzig, and a follower of Melancthon, wrote *Historica narratio de fratrum orthodoxorum ecclesiis in Bohemia, Moravia et Polonia*, published posthumously in 1605. Jan Łasicki (Johannis Lasitius, 1534–1602), a Polish protestant nobleman, compiled a history of the Czech Brethren from their beginnings, *Historiae de origine et rebus gestis fratrum Bohemorum liber VIII* (1649). The relevant eighth volume was finished in 1599 but first published in 1649 by Jan Amos Komenský (Comenius). Łasicki’s report is the most detailed and appears to be based either upon written notes from Brother Luke and Brother Thomas or upon their travel log. Goll, *Der Verkehr der Brüder mit den Waldensern*, 137–38, reprints an excerpt from Łasicki’s report. Lamping, *Ulrichus Velenus . . . and His Treatise against the Papacy*, 95, contends that Brother Luke and Brother Thomas went to Rome to “study the sources on the spot and to investigate the origins” of the tradition of St. Peter in Rome.

116. Blahoslav, *Summa*, quoted in Lange, *Der Papstesel*, 68.

117. Łasicki, *Historiae*, 207; Lange, *Der Papstesel*, 71.

118. Łasicki, *Historiae*, 207–8; Lange, *Der Papstesel*, 71.

119. *Ibid.*

keys of Christ, joins them with the sword, and overruns the kings with war. . . . In spite of the portents that appear as signs here and there in his realm, he only becomes more arrogant.¹²⁰

Łasicki continues, “As the Brethren, without amazement, observed these and many other abominations of the Antichrist who sits openly in the temple of God, they made the acquaintance of a Waldensian who likewise abhorred the pride and haughtiness of this false deity who was carried about on the shoulders of six porters.”¹²¹

The similarities between the symbolism in the Roman monster pasquinade and the comments from the Brethren are most striking. They refer to Babylon/Rome after the fall, to the misuse of the power of the keys, to papal abuse of temporal authority, and to portents ignored. These parallels suggest either that Brother Luke and Brother Thomas saw a politicized version of the Roman monster while visiting the Roman Waldensians or that they helped to create it as a pasquinade protest, to show the Roman Waldensians how they could “publicly condemn public sins.”¹²²

The evidence that the visiting Brethren took a copy of the politicized picture of the monster back to Bohemia is quite persuasive. Both Jan Blahoslav and Joachim Camerarius relate that the Italian Waldensians sent written messages via the emissaries to Bohemia. Brother Blahoslav notes that the Brethren took four letters back to Bohemia, including a “writing from a fellow believer who lived in Rome.”¹²³ Łasicki reports that the Brethren described Rome’s destruction and mentioned “portents that appear as signs” in the pope’s realm. This passage could be understood as an allusion to the destruction from the flood and the Roman monster. Given that the visiting Brethren took materials from Rome to Bohemia, it is very probable that they were the ones who took the image of the monster back north. It is also worth noting that the ecclesiological content of the image not only agreed with the ideology of the Brethren but that it also helped to reinforce the point that Brother Luke had made at the Conference of Chlumec. There he had hoped to reassure and win over the Minor Party by emphasizing points of agreement between the two factions. In the politicized version of the monster, the ecclesiological content was clear

120. Łasicki, *Historiae*, 205–6; Lange, *Der Papstesel*, 70.

121. Łasicki, *Historiae*, 207; Lange, *Der Papstesel*, 71.

122. Łasicki, *Historiae*, 207; Lange, *Der Papstesel*, 71.

123. Camerarius, *Historica*; and Blahoslav, *Summa*, quoted in Lange, *Der Papstesel*, 69. See also Goll, *Der Verkehr der Brüder mit den Waldensern*, 67n3.

and understandable, even for illiterate members of the Minor Party. Here was a pictorial representation of an ideological opposition to the secular claims of the papacy with which both factions of the Brethren as well as the Waldensians could agree.

The legend of the Roman monster of 1496, its representation as a divine portent, and its transformation into an antipapal pasquinade make up the first chapter in the story of the pope-ass. This politicized image expressed the ideology of the Waldensians and fitted well with the ecclesiology of the Unity. Indeed, it graphically expressed Luke of Prague's hope for finding common ground for reconciliation with the Minor Party of the Czech Brethren, by emphasizing shared beliefs regarding the effects of the Donation of Constantine on the Roman Church. The image's survival among the Brethren during a period of severe persecution and its eventual appearance in Wittenberg is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 2

The Roman Monster in the Kingdom of Bohemia, 1498–1523



BROTHER LUKE AND BROTHER THOMAS were almost certainly responsible for bringing the Italian original of the Roman monster back to the Kingdom of Bohemia. Whether they were the ones who actually delivered the illustration to Wenzel von Olmütz is not known. Konrad von Lange convincingly argues that von Olmütz made his copy during or after the second half of 1498.¹ Philip Melanchthon published his pamphlet on the pope-ass in 1523. During the twenty-five years between these two dates, the engraving of the Roman monster served the polemical needs of the religious radicals in the Bohemian lands² and survived various attempts by the king and the Inquisition to extirpate the printed materials of the Unity.

It seems clear that the audience for the illustration of the Roman monster consisted principally of members of the Bohemian Brethren and the Waldensians. These two groups shared many religious and ecclesiological ideas but they remained separate, existing side by side in the Bohemia of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century. Waldensianism had spread widely within the German population, remaining principally a German movement throughout the fifteenth century. In contrast, the *Unitas Fratrum* was a movement among the Czech-speaking majority. The Waldensians tended to keep to themselves, propagating their ideas through family connections, avoiding public confessions and outward signs of their beliefs. They observed their religious practices surreptitiously, at home, at night, behind closed doors. Though critical of traditional Catholicism, they usually remained members of a local Catholic parish. They feared that a public confession of faith might lead to persecution and possible execution. In contrast, the Bohemian Brethren placed emphasis on public confession of faith. As noted above, their

1. Lange, *Der Papstesel*, 74.

2. The terms “Kingdom of Bohemia” and “Bohemian lands” refer to the expanded Bohemian realm, including Moravia.

leader, Luke of Prague, actually criticized the Roman Waldensians for their unwillingness to voice their criticisms of the papacy. These two groups comprised the audience for the Roman monster engraving. To understand the circumstances affecting the production and dissemination of the reproduction, it is therefore necessary to study the conditions that these sects faced in the Bohemian realm at the start of the sixteenth century.

The Waldensians and Bohemian Brethren in the Kingdom of Bohemia

During the later Middle Ages, Waldensianism spread throughout the German population of the Bohemian kingdom and the Austrian borderlands. The historian Robert Lerner has estimated that by 1335 “ten thousand people, or about a tenth of the entire Bohemian German population”³ belonged to this persecuted, clandestine sect. In southern Bohemia, Waldensians formed entire villages in the German colonies.⁴ Careful historical research has demonstrated both the extent of the spread of the movement as well as the brutal attempts at its suppression by the Inquisition.⁵ One indication of the popular spread of Waldensianism can be seen in a comment from John of Jenštejn, the archbishop of Prague. In the early 1400s he wrote that the Waldensians had so prospered in the diocese of Olmütz that it would be dangerous to proceed against them.⁶

Waldensians helped create the climate that gave rise to the *Unitas Fratrum*. Their ecclesiology informed the thinking of Peter Chelčický, whose ideas were in turn foundational for the Unity. A group of German Waldensians, together with an elderly *magister*, was present at the Synod of Lhotka (1467), when the Brethren decided to begin creating their own priests, rather than relying on clerical converts from the Utraquist Church. In fact, the Brethren asked the elderly Waldensian priest to ordain the three men whom they chose as their new priests.⁷ When the leaders of the Unity decided to introduce the office of bishop, they turned to a Waldensian bishop for epis-

3. Lerner, “A Case of Religious Counter-Culture,” 238.

4. Ibid.; and Alberto Clot, “Waldenses,” in *New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, 12:246.

5. Lerner, “A Case of Religious Counter-Culture,” tells the story of the groundbreaking research of Alexander Patschovsky; see Patschovsky, *Die Anfänge einer ständigen Inquisition in Böhmen*, 3.

6. Kaminsky, *History of the Hussite Revolution*, 174.

7. Schweinitz, *History of . . . the Unitas Fratrum*, 138; Josef Mueller, “Bohemian Brethren” in *New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, 12:214.

copal ordination.⁸ The Council of the Brethren had even tried to negotiate a formal union with a group of Waldensians resident on the Austrian border in southern Moravia.⁹

These discussions ultimately failed because of the Unity's unrealistic demands. But dealings with a second group of Waldensians did lead to the establishment of a German-speaking branch of the Brethren. In Mark Brandenburg, in the area around Angermünde and Königsberg in der Neumark, a group of Waldensians had developed contacts with the Taborites and, through them, had established relations with the Unity. The Waldensians sent an emissary to visit Bohemia; shortly thereafter the Council of the Brethren sent a delegation to Brandenburg that included the German-speaking Brother Thomas of Landskron. He may himself have been a convert from Waldensianism, for he came from a region of Bohemia with a concentration of Waldensians. In Brandenburg, the Waldensians were suffering severe persecution and were therefore inclined to emigrate. In 1480, through the efforts of Brother Thomas, several hundred German refugees left Mark Brandenburg, joined the Brethren, and settled around Landskron on the Bohemian-Moravian border and around Fulnek in northeastern Moravia, between Olomouc (Olmütz) and Ostrava (Ostrau). In the early sixteenth century, members of this community served as interpreters, messengers, and translators in the Unity's contacts with German reformers.¹⁰

The relations between the German Waldensians and the Czech Brethren were cordial and friendly, even if a formal union did not take place. The Brethren maintained contact with the Waldensians in Italy, sending a delegation to them in 1498 and a second delegation in 1512. The Brethren attracted some Bohemian Waldensians as converts, but most chose to remain as a pietist sect within the Roman Church. As Gabriel Audisio states, "the entire Waldensian diaspora in Europe was in contact more or less regularly with the Unity."¹¹ Contacts such as these were not without danger. The Waldensians had been condemned as heretics as far back as the Fourth Lateran Council (1215). If the

8. Schweinitz, *History of . . . the Unitas Fratrum*, 139–52; Josef Mueller, "Bohemian Brethren," in *New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, 12:214; Müller, *Geschichte der Böhmisches Brüder*, 1:131, 134–35.

9. Brock, *Political and Social Doctrines of the Unity of Czech Brethren*, 79; Müller, *Geschichte der Böhmisches Brüder*, 1:181; Schweinitz, *History of . . . the Unitas Fratrum*, 156.

10. Zeman, *Anabaptists and the Czech Brethren*, 72–73; Müller, *Geschichte der Böhmisches Brüder*, 1:177; Alberto Clot, "Waldenses," in *New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, 12:248.

11. Audisio, *Waldensian Dissent*, 84.

Brethren became too closely identified with them, there was the danger that they too might be treated as condemned heretics. In a 1509 communication to King Vladislav II, Brother Luke made a point of denying that the Brethren were identical with the Waldensians.¹² Indeed, in one official document the Brethren referred to the fact that their enemies, out of hatred, libeled them as “picards” and erroneously called them Waldensians.¹³

This confusion posed an especial danger for the Brethren because in the early sixteenth century the Unity became the object of condemnation and persecution from many quarters. They faced opposition from the Utraquist Consistory, the Utraquist-dominated University of Prague, the Roman Catholic ecclesiastical hierarchy, the Inquisition, and the monarchy. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, both Pope Alexander VI and King Vladislav II tried to suppress the Unity and destroy their religious publications. The Brethren survived thanks to the triumph of baronial particularism within the Bohemian lands. During periods of heavy persecution, the image of the Roman monster would have had to circulate clandestinely, surviving only if kept in a secure hiding place. From 1498 to 1523, Bohemian and Moravian sectaries preserved the Roman monster cartoon in the face of condemnation and proscription.

Their opponents, the Roman Catholics and the Utraquists, reached a mutual accommodation in the 1485 Peace of Kutná Hora (Kuttenberg), in which they granted each other legal recognition and the free exercise of their separate religious practices. In 1512, the Bohemian Diet extended this arrangement indefinitely. Unlike the Lutheran-Catholic Religious Peace of Augsburg of 1555, which gave the German princes the right to determine the religion of their separate states, the Peace of Kutná Hora granted religious freedom to both nobility and to seignorial subjects.¹⁴

12. Molnár, *Die Waldenser*, 322–323.

13. Müller, *Geschichte der Böhmisches Brüder*, 1:109–10: This statement comes from the title of a preface to a confession of faith written in Czech in 1535. In German, the title reads “Vorrede der Ältesten der Brüder des Gesetzes Christi, die die Feinde aus Haß zu ihrer Beschimpfung Pikarten, und viele aus Irrtum Waldenser nennen.” The name “Brothers of the Law of Christ” was a designation that was used briefly before the term *Unitas Fratrum* gained acceptance. The term “picard” originated from the Free-spirit Beghards who came to Prague in the early fifteenth century. It came to be applied to the radical chiliasts within the Taborite movement, to the Adamites, and, as a term of derision, to the Brethren. See Kaminsky, *History of the Hussite Revolution*, 256, 343; Müller, *Geschichte der Böhmisches Brüder*, 1:111nn267, 269.

14. Zdeněk, *Finding the Middle Way*, 42.

The Brethren did not enjoy the benefits of recognition under this agreement.¹⁵ Nevertheless, they experienced a period of rapid growth during the years 1470 to 1500.¹⁶ Estimates of their numbers vary widely; recent studies claim that, by the end of the fifteenth century, the Unity numbered well over ten thousand adherents.¹⁷ In Bohemia, the congregations of the Brethren were concentrated in three general areas: to the east (and northeast), to the south, and to the northwest of the city of Prague.¹⁸ For Moravia, scholars have described the distribution of the Brethren by drawing an imaginary line from Jihlava (Iglau) through Brno (Brünn) to Kroměříž (Kremsier) and then south through Napajedla (Napajedl) to Uherský Brod (Ungarisch Brod). The area south of this line is South Moravia; it comprises about one-third of the margravate. The congregations of the *Unitas Fratrum* were divided almost equally between the southern and northern parts. In the south, 130 towns and villages had either independent congregations, branch congregations, or small groups of Brethren visited by a pastor from elsewhere; in the north there were 124 towns and villages that had either congregations or small, organized groups of Brethren.¹⁹

No explanation of the religious polity of the late fifteenth-century Bohemian realm would be complete without mention of the printing presses that each of the religious groups controlled. In the early 1500s, the Unity owned two printing presses; by 1519 they had added a third. In contrast, the Roman Catholics and the Utraquists each had one press.²⁰ During the first decade of the sixteenth century, the Unity published no fewer than fifty works, including a catechism, a hymnal, and several confessions of faith, as well as polemical writings and scriptural commentaries. During this same period, the Catholics and

15. Kamil Krofta, "Bohemia in the Fifteenth Century," in *Cambridge Medieval History*, 3:110.

16. Brock, *Political and Social Doctrines of the Unity of Czech Brethren*, 103; Grindely, *Geschichte der Böhmisches Brüder*, 1: 95.

17. Brock, *Political and Social Doctrines of the Unity of Czech Brethren*, 103n1; Řičan, *History of the Unity*, 90; Odložilík, *Hussite King*, 275–76. Nineteenth-century studies claimed that there were 150,000 to 200,000 Brethren in Bohemia and Moravia by 1500; Schweinitz, *History of . . . the Unitas Fratrum*, 225; Grindely, *Geschichte der Böhmisches Brüder*, 1:93–94.

18. For a more complete list of villages where Brethren were located, see Schweinitz, *History of . . . the Unitas Fratrum*, 223–24; Grindely, *Geschichte der Böhmisches Brüder*, 1:92–93; Müller, *Geschichte der Böhmisches Brüder*, 1:231–32.

19. Zeman, *Anabaptists and Czech Brethren*, 289–93; and Grindely, *Geschichte der Böhmisches Brüder*, 1:94. See the map in Řičan, *History of the Unity*, following 439.

20. The Catholic press was located at Plzeň (Pilsen); the Utraquist press was at Prague.

the Utraquists combined published only ten works.²¹ It is no wonder that those who wished to extirpate the Unity focused especially on their printed materials.

The Unity placed great emphasis on rudimentary literacy; in this regard they continued the tradition of the Taborites. Though they remained suspicious of the higher learning of universities, they were pioneers in developing primary education.²² In 1482, the Brethren established their first school; at the end of the century still more schools were set up.²³ One measure of the relative success of the Brethren in teaching elementary literacy can be seen in the popular calumny that their Catholic and Utraquist enemies leveled against them, namely, that the devil gave them the ability to read.²⁴ Their enemies alleged that, when someone joined the Brethren, he had to stand facing the east with his mouth open until a fly flew into it. At that point he would immediately be able to read, thanks to the power of the devil. But if the convert should leave the sect, then the devil would deprive him of this ability. Apparently enough of the Brethren could read that their envious detractors felt that supernatural intervention must be the explanation. Literacy and the availability of printed materials helped propagate the ideas of the Brethren and led to the growth of the Unity during the closing years of the fifteenth century.

But literacy and printing presses do not entirely explain the spread of the Unity. The relative weakness of the monarchy and the king's failure to suppress the Brethren also played an important role in the Unity's success. King George of Poděbrady, who died in 1471, had done much to strengthen the position of the monarch and to mitigate antagonisms between the different religious and ethnic groups. His successor, however, did not build on these accomplishments.

In the year that King George died, the fifteen-year-old son of the Polish king succeeded to the throne as King Vladislav II of Bohemia. The king of Hungary, Matthias Corvinus, immediately challenged the Jagiellonian dynasty in Bohemia. Finally, in 1478, the Peace of Olmütz spelled out a compromise between these two contenders. Matthias Corvinus retained Moravia, Silesia, and Upper and Lower Lusatia, while Vladislav kept Bohemia proper.

21. Schweinitz, *History of . . . the Unitas Fratrum*, 226–27; Grindely, *Geschichte der Böhmischen Brüder*, 1:124.

22. Brock, *Political and Social Doctrines of the Unity of Czech Brethren*, 100.

23. Schools were established in Moravia in 1498 and in Bohemia in 1500, see *ibid.*

24. Hutton, *History of the Moravian Church*, 77; Müller, *Die deutschen Katechismen der Böhmischen Brüder*, 319; Müller, *Geschichte der Böhmischen Brüder*, 1:312.

Both men received the title “King of Bohemia.” This confusing situation disappeared in 1490 when Matthias died without a legitimate heir, and Vladislav was elected to the Hungarian throne. With Matthias’s death, Moravia, Lusatia, and Silesia reverted to Vladislav. The new Jagiellonian king spent most of his time at Ofen in Hungary, leaving his chancellor, Albert of Kolowrat, to attend to his royal interests in Bohemia.²⁵

King Vladislav was largely ineffective at promoting the authority of the king against the increasingly powerful Bohemian nobility. The last years of the fifteenth century and the first two decades of the sixteenth century saw a strong reemergence of the estate state (*Ständestaat*) in Bohemia and Moravia.²⁶ The great barons gained influence and authority as the power of the crown declined. This meant that, while the Jagiellonian king might from time to time attempt a forceful extermination of the *Unitas Fratrum*, he could only have success on royal domains and in those areas where either Catholic or Utraquist authorities supported his efforts. The benevolent protection afforded by noble families was essential for the well-being of the Brethren. In some cases, the nobles were, in fact, members of the Unity; in other cases, they were simply tolerant individuals who chose to defend this minority for their own separate reasons. Noble protectors of the Unity included numerous important baronial families.²⁷

Persecution of the Bohemian Brethren

For much of his reign, Vladislav was under the influence of powerful Catholic advisers who urged him to take action against the Brethren. These included the poet and humanist scholar Bohuslav Hasišteinský of Lobkovice, who briefly served the king in an official capacity during 1502; the chancellor of Hungary and bishop of Varadin, Jan Filipec, known as the Barefooted (because he joined the Franciscans late in life); Dr. Augustin Kasebrod, a canon of Olmütz; and Jan Šlechta of Wšehrd, the king’s private secretary. The queen, Anne de

25. In 1509, Vladislav arranged for his two-year-old son, Louis, to be elected as King of Bohemia. In 1516, Louis succeeded his father, ruling for ten years until he was defeated and killed by the Turks at the Battle of Mohács. The death of King Louis meant the end of the Jagiellonian dynasty in Bohemia. In 1526, Ferdinand of Hapsburg, the brother of Emperor Charles V and the brother-in-law of King Louis, was elected as the king of Bohemia, thus beginning the long period of Hapsburg rule.

26. Eberhard, “Political System and the Intellectual Traditions of the Bohemian *Ständestaat*,” 23–47.

27. Odložilik, *Hussite King*, 276; Říčan, *History of the Unity*, 93; Schweinitz, *History of . . . the Unitas Fratrum*, 225; Müller, *Geschichte der Böhmisches Brüder*, 1:303–5. Protectors of the Unity included nobles such as Jan Kostka of Postupice, Citibor and Jan Tovačavsky, Jan Rychnovský of Rychnov, and others. See Brock, *Political and Social Doctrines of the Czech Brethren*, 97.

Foix-Candale, joined her voice to these influential advisers in opposition to the Unity.²⁸

The king found support for his suppression of the Unity from the Catholic nobles of Bohemia, the Utraquist estates, and the Utraquist masters of the University of Prague. The Catholic estates hoped to make common cause with the Utraquists against the Brethren. Their ultimate goal was a union of Catholics and Utraquists under papal leadership. The Utraquist clergy in Prague and the university likewise favored a union with the Catholics as a means to gain papal recognition of the *Compactata* (the 1433 agreement between the Council of Basel and the Utraquists that Pope Pius II had rejected). To accomplish this, and thus secure their own position, the Utraquists were willing to commit to strong opposition to the Brethren.²⁹

In 1503, King Vladislav initiated the first of two periods of royally sanctioned persecution of the Brethren. In that year, a disaffected remnant of the Minor Party known as the Amosites³⁰ formally submitted to the king a complaint against the Brethren, falsely alleging that they planned to defend their faith by taking up arms. Motivated by this fabrication and by the animus of his advisers, Vladislav issued an order on July 5, 1503, to the administrator of the Utraquist Consistory, the magistrates of Prague, the cathedral chapter, and the administrator of royal towns directing them to proscribe the religious activities of the Unity.³¹ He told the cathedral chapter and the Utraquist Consistory to preach against the Brethren, whom he described as “more wicked and abominable than the Turks, for, ensnared by the devil, they believe neither in God nor in the Lord’s Supper.”³² He ordered the Prague magistrates to forbid any assembly of the Brethren within the city walls. He instructed his agents to visit all royal towns and estates for the purpose of arresting Unity clergy, displacing Unity office holders, and forcing recusant Brethren to attend either a Catholic or an Utraquist Church.³³

28. Řičan, *History of the Unity*, 90; Grindely, *Geschichte der Böhmisches Brüder*, 1:98–104; Schweinitz, *History of . . . the, Unitas Fratrum*, 184; and, regarding humanist opponents to the Unity, Müller, *Geschichte der Böhmisches Brüder*, 1:307.

29. Grindely, *Geschichte der Böhmisches Brüder*, 1:105–8.

30. The Amosites were named after their leader, Amos of Stekna; see *ibid.*, 1:314.

31. The king’s interdiction could only be enforced throughout the kingdom if approved by the diet. However, he had direct influence over his royal estates and the clergy.

32. Grindely, *Geschichte der Böhmisches Brüder*, 1:106; Müller, *Geschichte der Böhmisches Brüder*, 1:315.

33. *Ibid.*, 1:106–7; Schweinitz, *History of . . . the Unitas Fratrum*, 184–85.

During this first phase, fierce persecutions lasted from 1503 to 1505 and were concentrated on the royal domains and the estates of barons who supported the king. But the proscriptions against the Unity could not take effect throughout all of Bohemia unless approved by the diet, whose members were divided among supporters of the three religious groups—Catholic, Utraquist, and Unity. Nobles supportive of the Brethren succeeded in persuading the diet that the Unity should be given a hearing rather than being condemned outright. Although the planned colloquy never actually took place, the advocacy of influential barons thwarted attempts to implement the king's edict throughout the realm.³⁴

Severe persecution forced the Brethren to hold their religious services in private homes and at secret meeting places deep in the forests. They attempted to defend themselves by submitting a new confession of faith to the king, but to no avail. One response of the Brethren was especially reflective of the rigorous religious demands they placed on themselves. Luke of Prague persuaded the leaders of the Unity to adopt a resolution requiring all members to make public confession of their beliefs on pain of excommunication. This action is reminiscent of his earlier criticism of the Roman Waldensians for their reluctance to stand up publicly for their beliefs.³⁵

The first phase of the king's persecution of the *Unitas Fratrum* began to subside during 1505, though this proved to be only a lull before the next storm. In 1506 and again in 1507, Dr. Augustin Kasebrod published open letters against the Unity, which he presented to the king. In these he denounced the Brethren in the most violent language, stating that they were "not worthy of being swallowed up and consumed by the noble flames of fire, [rather] wild beasts should trample them and tear their bodies to pieces, and dogs should lick up their blood."³⁶

The chancellor of the kingdom, Albert of Kolowrat, now renewed the assault against the Brethren by publishing a new royal edict, approved by Vladislav, summoning the bishops of the Brethren to Prague and proclaiming that their church was to be suppressed throughout Bohemia. This decree, lacking confirmation by the diet, clearly challenged the authority of the estates. Baron

34. Baron Šelnberk and Baron Pernštejn were themselves Catholic, but they nevertheless showed tolerance and even support for the Unity, see Řičan, *History of the Unity*, 90; Grindely, *Geschichte der Böhmischen Brüder*, 1:108–9.

35. Ibid., 111.

36. Grindely, *Geschichte der Böhmischen Brüder*, 1:130.

Vilém of Pernštejn immediately protested to the king, asserting his territorial rights and warning of dire consequences if these rights were violated.³⁷

The king's frame of mind can be seen in a communication that he sent to Baroness Martha of Boskovice, in response to a letter that she had sent him defending the Brethren. King Vladislav wrote:

My dear well-born one!

You write to us of the Picard [the common derisive term for the Unity] rascals, as though our purpose to destroy them, which we have announced to all the States [estates] of our kingdom, were improper and unduly severe.

Know that what we do, we do more out of mercy than severity. For while we intend; [*sic*] as is proper and required both by divine and human law, to burn and destroy these miserable and mistaken heretics, we, at the same time, have compassion on them in that we show them a way of escape by permitting them to join either the Catholics or the Utraquists.

It is our will that what we have published shall strictly be carried out. If this is not done, be assured that we will not any longer suffer the presence of such heretical rascals, but will chase them out of our kingdom without mercy.

Of this inform your brethren who have written to us.³⁸

On the Day of St. James, July 25, 1508, the king began the second phase of persecution by presenting a royal edict to the diet at Prague, which both the Catholic and the Utraquist estates adopted. Formally published on August 10, it came to be known as the Mandate of St. James and consisted of the following points:

1. The religious services of the Unity, whether public or private, are forbidden;
2. The sale of its publications is to cease and they are to be destroyed;
3. Its priests are no longer to administer the sacraments and solemnize marriages;
4. Its priests are, furthermore, to be cited for recantation before the ecclesiastical tribunals; if they refuse, they are to be punished by the civil courts;
5. All barons, knights, and magistrates of Prague as also of other cities and towns are commanded to carry out this act, on pain of an official warning from the chief burgrave of the kingdom, and if this does not avail, of trial by the national court;
6. Any one harboring a Picard [member of the Unity]

37. Schweinitz, *History of . . . the Unitas Fratrum*, 190; Müller, *Geschichte der Böhmisches Brüder*, 1:340–41.

38. Schweinitz, *History of . . . the Unitas Fratrum*, 190; Grindely, *Geschichte der Böhmisches Brüder*, 1:127–28.

and refusing to deliver him to his manor-lord is to be fined; 7. The members of the Unity are to be instructed in the true faith by Catholic and Utraquist priests, into whose hands the Picard parishes and their revenues are, without exception, to be given.³⁹

Item two especially relates to the survival of the illustration of the Roman monster. Its full text reads: “All teachings and writings about their [the Unity’s] errors, whether done in secret or in the open, shall cease, and all of their books shall be destroyed and burned, whether written or printed. No lord, no knight, and no town shall allow such tracts to be written, printed, or sold. Whoever contravenes this order shall be punished by the judgment of provincial law.”⁴⁰

To effect implementation of this mandate in Moravia, Jan Filipec (the Barefooted), bishop of Varadin, together with Baron John of Rosenberg, traveled to Brno (Brünn) to meet with the Moravian Diet, hoping to convince the assembled estates to endorse the king’s wishes. One of the most influential Moravian nobles, Baron Jan of Žerotín, however, supported the Brethren, and persuaded his colleagues to vote against enacting the mandate.⁴¹ While some Moravian nobles were convinced to act against the Unity, in general the persecutions in the margravate were less severe than in Bohemia. There, all public religious services of the Unity ceased; if the Brethren met, they did so in secret, at night, hidden in the forests. In February 1510, the Bohemian Diet renewed the mandate and a new wave of persecutions began. For their own safety, the members of the Unity’s Executive Council moved from Bohemia to Moravia.

In 1515, fully aware that his coreligionists were facing a dire situation, Luke of Prague determined to travel to western Bohemia to visit a congregation of the Brethren. In September, together with two companions, Luke visited Petr Suda, baron of Janovice, whom Luke understood to be friendly towards the Brethren. Unfortunately for him, Suda proved to be nothing more than a robber-knight⁴² looking for bounty. He imprisoned Brother Luke and

39. Schweinitz, *History of . . . the Unitas Fratrum*, 191–92; Říčan, *History of the Unity*, 95; and Grindely, *Geschichte der Böhmisches Brüder*, 1:132–35; Atwood, *Theology of the Czech Brethren*, 186–88.

40. Grindely, *Geschichte der Böhmisches Brüder*, 1:133; Müller, *Geschichte der Böhmisches Brüder*, 1:348.

41. Říčan, *History of the Unity*, 96, states that the Mandate was accepted in Moravia but with limitations: “The valid force of the mandate in Moravia was thus in doubt.” See also Müller, *Geschichte der Böhmisches Brüder*, 1:351.

42. Schweinitz, *History of . . . the Unitas Fratrum*, 197; Grindely, *Geschichte der Böhmisches Brüder*, 1:152–57; Müller, *Geschichte der Böhmisches Brüder*, 1:383–86.

his companions under very harsh conditions. Luke was chained in a dungeon; one of his comrades suffered torture on the rack. Suda made arrangements to turn them over to the authorities in Prague, no doubt expecting a reward. Informed of Luke's plight, Baron Kunrát of Krajek, a patron of the Unity, managed to get a court decree ordering his release. After suffering for more than two weeks, Luke and his fellow Brethren were set free, but only after posting a bond to secure their promise to appear before the Utraquist Consistory within the next six months.

Before this hearing could take place, King Vladislav died. His death and the succession of his minor son, Louis, led to an outbreak of feuds between the barons and townsmen as well as renewed struggles between the Utraquists and Catholics. The Pacification of St. Wenzel (September 28, 1517) restored a level of political stability. According to this agreement, the estates recognized both Emperor Maximilian and King Sigismund of Poland as the guardians of Louis. A panel of six directors took over the day-to-day administration of government. In this disrupted circumstance, the nobles supportive of the Brethren strengthened their political position, the Mandate of St. James ceased to be enforced,⁴³ and Luke of Prague never had to appear before the Utraquist Consistory.

While the patronage of nobles supportive of the Brethren thwarted King Vladislav's persecutions, the effects of the Mandate of St. James should not be underestimated. It significantly disrupted the activities of the Brethren, caused suffering for many of their members (including seven known executions),⁴⁴ and resulted in the destruction of many of their publications. One can safely assume that these royal persecutions also resulted in the destruction of copies of von Olmütz's engraving of the Roman monster.

King Vladislav was not the only figure of authority seeking to extirpate the Unity. During the early years of the sixteenth century, the pope also sought to suppress the Brethren and destroy their printed materials. To this end, he ordered the Inquisition into Moravia under the leadership of one of the best-known Dominican inquisitors, Dr. Heinrich Institoris.⁴⁵ Leader of

43. In Bohemia, the Mandate of St. James remained law until 1609; see Řičan, *History of the Unity*, 96.

44. *Ibid.*, 92, 100; Müller, *Geschichte der Böhmisches Brüder*, 318.

45. For a general discussion of Institoris's mission to Moravia see Grindely, *Geschichte der Böhmisches Brüder*, 1:96–98; Schweinitz, *History of . . . the Unitas Fratrum*, 183; Řičan, *History of the Unity*, 91; Hutton, *History of the Moravian Church*, 77; Lange, *Der Papstesel*, 62–67; Müller, *Geschichte der Böhmisches Brüder*, 1:311–12; Atwood, *Theology of the Czech Brethren*, 213–14.

the Inquisition in Germany, Institoris was the coauthor, together with Jacob Sprenger, of the infamous *Hammer of Witches* (*Malleus Maleficarum*). In 1499, he received a papal charge to extirpate the *Unitas Fratrum* and to seek out and burn their books, especially a work by Peter Chelčický entitled *The Picture of the Antichrist*.

He began his mission by inviting the leaders of the Unity to a colloquium. In response, two of the Brethren journeyed to Olmütz to meet with him. The discussions led to a frank exchange in which the Brethren criticized the Roman Church as the church of the Antichrist. Understandably, the disputants reached no agreement. Institoris reported that the Brethren “received the devil into their mouths in the likeness of a fly, who then taught them infernal wisdom.”⁴⁶ After this unsuccessful colloquium, Institoris began traveling around the countryside of Moravia, preaching and writing against the Unity, and attempting to destroy their publications. He wrote an extensive report on his inquisitorial activities, entitled *Sancte Romane ecclesie fidei defensionis . . .*,⁴⁷ which he composed during the period from 1498 to 1500 and published in Olmütz in 1501. This treatise provides an important insight into the ecclesiastical controversy that was taking place in the diocese of Olmütz just when Wenzel von Olmütz was making a copy of the illustration of the Roman monster.

In this work, Institoris does not mention the picture of the monster, *per se*, but he does make frequent reference to images (presumably widespread in Olmütz at the time) that were illustrative of the power of the keys of St. Peter, and of the mystical body of the church, whose head is Christ (rather than the pope), and whose members must obey the head. He also makes reference to *Roma caput mundi*. In other words, Institoris’s report associates the language of ecclesiastical polemics with the thematic content of the Roman monster illustration.⁴⁸ This same parallel can be found in a letter that the Czech humanist Jan Šlechta of Všehrad sent to Erasmus in October of 1519. He wrote, “They [the Brethren] consider the pope and other ecclesiastical persons as antichrists and

46. Řičan, *History of the Unity*, 91. See also Hutton, *History of the Moravian Church*, 77; Müller, *Katechismen der Böhmisches Brüder*, 319–20n1; Müller, *Geschichte der Böhmisches Brüder*, 1:312.

47. The full title is *Sancte Romane ecclesie fidei defensionis clippeum Adversus waldēsium seu Pickardorum heresim Certas germanie Bohemieque naciones in odium cleri ac enervacionē ecclesiastice potestatis virulenta cōtagiōe sparsim inficientes*. See Lange, *Der Papstesel*, 63–64; Schweinitz, *History of . . . the Unitas Fratrum*, 183.

48. Lange, *Der Papstesel*, 64.

speak of the pope as the beast [of the bottomless pit, Revelation 17:8] or as the whore of the apocalypse.”⁴⁹

While the Unity led the criticism of the papacy, others who did not join the Brethren were nevertheless upset because they felt that the moral tone of the clergy, especially the clergy in the diocese of Olmütz, had significantly deteriorated during the period of two absentee bishops (1491–97). Innocent VIII had appointed an Italian cardinal who did not reside in Olmütz;⁵⁰ when the see was again vacant, Alexander VI installed his nephew Cardinal Juan Borgia, who likewise remained absent. Finally, in 1497 a native, Stanislaus Thurzo, became bishop. During this extended episcopal absence, the morality of the clergy reportedly declined, as noted in an anonymous poem written as a complaint (*Klagschrift*). In 1499, a printer in Olmütz published this poem, entitled “Lamentation of the Ruin of the Church” (“*Planctus ruinae ecclesiae*”).⁵¹ It consisted of 117 stanzas written half in Latin and half in German. It protested the secular interests of the clergy and complained about their lust for power, arrogance, intolerance, laziness, and wickedness. It demanded that the clergy renounce their temporal power and return to the simplicity of the apostolic church. While there are similarities between the themes of this complaint and certain ideas of the Brethren, the anonymous poem does not reject the hierarchical church or condemn monasticism. It simply criticizes the moral turpitude of the clergy. In other words, it reflects the critical attitudes of Catholics in Olmütz rather than the opinions of the Brethren.⁵²

Wenzel von Olmütz’s Reproduction of the Roman Monster

This poem helps to explain the ecclesiastical environment within which Wenzel von Olmütz lived and worked.⁵³ Although he was not a native of Olmütz, he seems to have resided there throughout his career. Active from circa 1481 to circa 1500, Olmütz was a goldsmith whose principal employer would probably have been the bishop.⁵⁴ The episcopal absence from 1491 to 1497 may, therefore, have negatively affected his workshop. In addition, he was a copper engraver

49. Müller, *Geschichte der Böhmisches Brüder*, 1:393.

50. Innocent VIII appointed Cardinal Ardicino della Porta.

51. “Incipit planctus ruine eccle / sie latino simul et vulgari / ydeo-mate Richmi / co seu versifico / modo cō/ positus...” See Lange, *Der Papstesel*, 97–105, for extensive excerpts of this work.

52. See *ibid.*, 66–67 for a discussion of this poem.

53. For a thorough review of the attribution of the symbol “W” to Wenzel von Olmütz see Lehrs, *Wenzel von Olmütz*, 1–31; Lehrs, *Meister des Hausbuches*, 243–56; Lange, *Der Papstesel*, 1–8.

54. Hutchinson, *Illustrated Bartsch*, 9.2:129.

who specialized in reproductions. More than half of his known illustrations are copies of works by Martin Schongauer, though he also reproduced works by Albrecht Dürer. He thus helped to introduce both of these artists to eastern Europe.⁵⁵ Given that he focused on reproductions, it is not surprising that he copied the Italian picture of the Roman monster.

Exactly how the Italian illustration came to his attention is unknown, though, as noted above, there is reason to believe that Brother Luke and Brother Thomas brought it with them when they returned from Rome. It no doubt circulated within the communities of the Unity. It is unlikely that von Olmütz was himself a member of the Brethren, for they considered the craft of painting (and presumably also goldsmithery and copper engraving) a forbidden occupation, because of its association with wealth and luxury.⁵⁶ The building crafts and the production of clothing and other necessities were professions that the Brethren allowed, as long as they were not “accompanied by display, unrighteousness, adornment, luxury and injustice.”⁵⁷ Even a cursory review of Wenzel’s oeuvre shows much “adornment” and “luxury” in his engravings and in his designs for monstrances, pokals, and gothic pinnacles.⁵⁸ Furthermore, his illustrations of religious themes seem clearly grounded in motifs typical of traditional late medieval Catholicism.

While not a member of the Brethren, von Olmütz may have been in sympathy with their ideas, or he may simply have shared in the general dissatisfaction with the papacy, occasioned by the effects in Olmütz of nepotism and episcopal absence. As a businessman, he may have also realized that there would be a market for an illustration that expressed criticism of the papacy.

The presence of the Inquisition in Moravia helps in the dating of von Olmütz’s engraving of the monster. Assuming that Brother Luke and Brother Thomas brought the image back with them from Italy, the *terminus post quem* for its creation must be the middle of 1498, for the emissaries stopped in Florence on their way back home, where they witnessed the execution of Girolamo Savonarola on May 23, 1498. They therefore could not have arrived in the Bohemian kingdom before the middle of the year. The papal brief in

55. Ibid.

56. Forbidden occupations included “dicing, gaming, juggling, painting, prophesying, fortune-telling, witchcraft, usury, alchemy, pimping, prostitution, [and] music.” See Brock, *Political and Social Doctrines of the Unity of Czech Brethren*, 233; Müller, *Geschichte der Böhmisches Brüder*, 1:289.

57. Brock, *Political and Social Doctrines of the Unity of Czech Brethren*, 234. This quotation is taken from a decree issued at the beginning of the sixteenth century.

58. Hutchinson, *Illustrated Bartsch*, 9.2:130–91.

which Alexander VI empowered the Inquisition in Moravia is dated January 31, 1499. Shortly thereafter, Dr. Institoris was active in Moravia, with orders to prevent printers from putting out heretical materials. In this circumstance, it would have been very foolish for Wenzel to place his distinctive “W” prominently on an antipapal cartoon. The spring of 1499 must thus be the *terminus ante quem* for the illustration. Consequently, von Olmütz’s copy of the Roman monster must date from the last months of 1498 or the very early part of 1499.⁵⁹

From that point on, the Roman monster circulated in Moravia and Bohemia, passing surreptitiously from hand to hand and serving the polemical needs of religious radicals who found its ecclesiological and antipapal content meaningful. One hint of this clandestine circulation can be seen in the physical condition of the copy preserved in the Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum in Braunschweig.⁶⁰ While the front of the image is in excellent condition, on the reverse one can clearly see a pattern of stains indicating folds that would have reduced the engraving to one quarter of its size, leaving the folded edges exposed to soiling. It appears that the Braunschweig copy may have been folded so that it could be hidden in a sleeve or pocket and passed from person to person, just as popular Reformation pamphlets were secretly handed around. Clearly secrecy was important, given the efforts of both Dr. Institoris and King Vladislav to destroy the print materials of the Unity. It is likely that many of the copies of the cartoon were indeed burned. Only six copies are known to have survived; they are located at Braunschweig, Coburg, Dresden, Frankfurt am Main, London, and Paris.⁶¹

At least one copy made its way to Wittenberg. There, Martin Luther and Philip Melanchthon decided upon a joint publication project in which each would take a separate monstrous portent and interpret it for purposes of polemical propaganda. Thus, Melanchthon’s pamphlet on the pope-ass and Luther’s tract on the monk-calf came into being. It is therefore fitting to conclude a discussion of the fate of the Roman monster cartoon from 1498 to

59. Lange, *Der Papstesel*, 67.

60. I wish to thank Dr. Susanne Mädger of the Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum, Braunschweig, for assisting me in viewing the Wenzel von Olmütz *Roma caput mundi* engraving.

61. The copy of the *Roma caput mundi* illustration at Paris is presumably the one formerly in the Lanna collection in Prague. This collection was sold at auction at the end of the nineteenth century. In 1891 Konrad von Lange listed copies at Braunschweig, Coburg, Dresden, Frankfurt am Main, London, and Prague; in 1991 Jane Hutchinson listed the same first five copies, but substituted Paris for Prague. See Lange, *Der Papstesel*, 2; Hutchinson, *Illustrated Bartsch*, 9.2:172.

1523 by examining Luther's contacts with Bohemians, in order to discover how and when the illustration made it into his hands.

Luther Receives the Roman Monster Illustration

Fortunately, Luther himself has left a reference that can serve as a *terminus ante quem* in searching for likely Bohemian contacts through which he acquired a copy of the Roman monster. But for this approach to be successful, the dating of Luther's comment must be both specific and accurate. In 1522, Luther published a sermon written on the Gospel for the Second Sunday in Advent, Luke 21:25–33. This text speaks of “signs in the sun and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, by reason of the confusion of the roaring of the sea and of the waves; Men withering away for fear, and expectation of what shall come upon the whole world. For the powers of heaven shall be moved.” As one might imagine, Luther used this passage as the basis for a long disquisition on the meaning of astronomical and terrestrial wonders.

In this context, he stated,

No astronomer will say that the course of the heavens foretold the coming of the terrible beast which the Tiber threw up a few years ago; a beast with the head of an ass, the breast and body of a woman, the foot of an elephant for its right hand, with the scales of a fish on its legs, and the head of a dragon in its hinder parts, etc. This beast typifies the papacy and the great wrath and punishment of God. Such a mass of signs presages greater results than the mind of man can conceive.⁶²

From this passage it is clear that Luther knew about the Roman monster and understood it in antipapal terms. It is, of course, possible that someone told him the story of the creature. But given his interpretation of the creature, and given Cranach's woodcut version that illustrated Melanchthon's 1523 pamphlet (fig. 3), it seems probable that Luther had seen a copy of von Olmütz's illustration.

In order to isolate a likely contact between Luther and a Bohemian source, one must have a more precise date of composition than simply the publication year of 1522. Fortunately, the text itself provides the necessary information. Six paragraphs after the reference to the monster, Luther wrote of “the great constellation of the planets that is now going to occur in two

62. WA, 10.1/2:105; St.L., 11:56; WML 10:70.

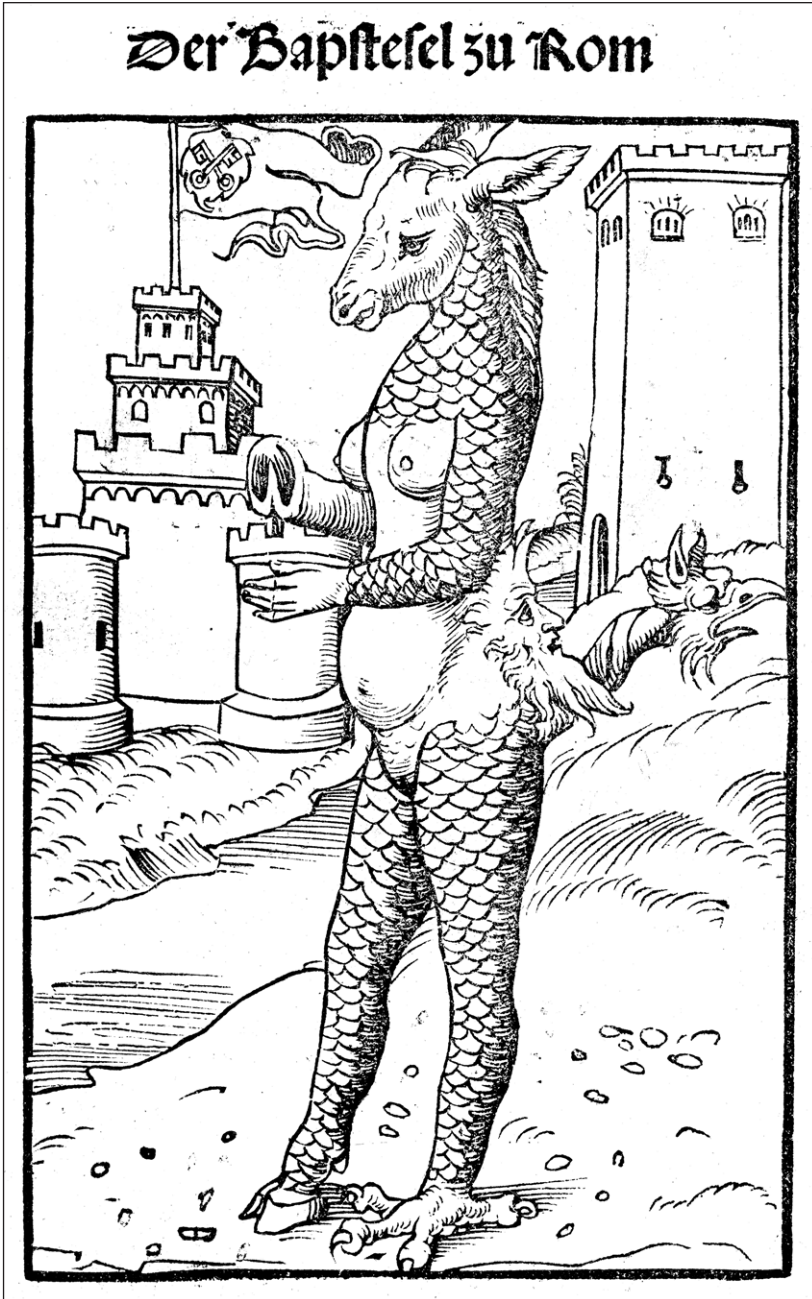


Figure 3: *Papstfessel* woodcut by Lucas Cranach (1523). Courtesy of the Richard C. Kessler Reformation Collection, Pitts Theology Library, Candler School of Theology, Emory University.

years.”⁶³ The reference here is to a planetary conjunction that was said to happen only every 960 years, predicted to take place in February 1524; supposedly, this event would cause floods, disease, death, and civil disturbance.⁶⁴ Given that this auspicious conjunction was supposed to take place in February 1524, and given that Luther says that it will occur “in two years,” we can conclude that Luther wrote his sermon for the Second Sunday in Advent around the month of February 1522. This dating, in fact, fits well with the compositional history of the other Advent postils, as Walther Köhler has shown in his “Einleitung zur Wartburgpostille.”⁶⁵

Assuming that Luther learned of the Roman monster sometime before February 1522, one must next examine Luther’s Bohemian contacts prior to that date, to discover potential sources for his copy of the illustration of the monstrosity. Luther was an avid letter writer. Especially during the turmoil of the early years of the Reformation, he wrote regularly to his advisers and supporters, people like Georg Spalatin (the chaplain, librarian, and private secretary to Luther’s prince, the Elector of Saxony), and to Johann Lang (a humanist Augustinian who was the prior of the Augustinian monastery at Erfurt). In letters to these and other friends, Luther not only chronicled the course of the Reformation, but also described the development of his own thinking and commented on the books and pamphlets he was reading.

In a letter to Georg Spalatin dated February 3, 1521,⁶⁶ Luther states that he has received a book written by a learned young Bohemian that attempts to prove that St. Peter never traveled to nor was ever present in Rome. Were this contention to be true, it would call into question the primacy of the bishop of Rome, which was based, at least in part, upon Rome’s being the episcopal see of St. Peter. The book to which Luther referred is a treatise by Ulrichus Velenus (Oldřich Velenský) entitled *Petrum Romam non venisse*.⁶⁷ Circumstantial evidence suggests that Luther received a copy of von Olmütz’s Roman monster at the same time that he received Velenus’s treatise. However, before

63. WA, 10.1/2:107.

64. Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk*, 124; Zambelli, “Astrologi hallucinati”; Barnes, *Prophecy and Gnosis*, 143; Thorndike, *History of Magic*, 5:178–233.

65. WA, 10.1/2:LIV–LVI.

66. WABr, 2:260; St.L., 21a:330–31.

67. The full title of Velenus’s treatise is *In hoc libello gravissimis, certissimisque, et in sacra scriptura fundatis rationibus variis probatur, Apostolum Petrum Romam non venisse, neque illic passum, proinde satis frivole, et temere Romanus Pontifex se Petri successorem iactat, et nominat etc.* See Lamping, *Ulrichus Velenus*, 209–76; WABr, 2:261n9; St.L., 21a:330–31, 331n6.

pursuing that point, Luther's other Bohemian contacts prior to February 1522 must be examined as possible sources for his knowledge of the monster.

Before February 1522, in addition to Velenus, there is record of Luther's having contact with three other Bohemians, all in connection with the Leipzig Disputation. This debate took place in 1519, famous for being the occasion on which Luther first publicly endorsed some of Hus's ideas. In the audience at Leipzig was an Utraquist organist from Prague named Jacob. After the debate, he spoke with Luther and agreed to send him some writings of John Hus. When Jacob returned to Prague he told the clergy at the Teyn Church about Luther's defense of Hus. The pastor, Jan Poduška, and his vicar, Master Václav Rožďalovský, then sent letters of support to Luther. Pastor Poduška also sent a gift of cutlery and Vicar Rožďalovský sent a copy of Hus's *De ecclesia*. Luther received the letters and gifts in October 1519.⁶⁸ In light of the fact that the Utraquists, at this time, were seeking papal recognition and closer relations with Rome, it seems that these contacts were merely friendly gestures toward someone who had embraced their revered founder rather than an attempt to spread antipapal propaganda. It therefore seems unlikely that organist Jacob, Pastor Poduška, or Vicar Rožďalovský gave the von Olmütz illustration to Luther.

During this same time period, there occurred one other reference to Bohemia in a letter that Luther sent to Johann Lang. In December 1519, Luther wrote Lang telling him of a tract that was circulating in Wittenberg, which was believed to be by a Bohemian and made a learned, theological argument against the tyranny of the Roman [papal] court.⁶⁹ This is indeed an interesting reference, but scholars have been unable to identify either the author or the title of the tract. It therefore remains obscure and thus unhelpful in solving the present question. The February 3, 1521, reference to a treatise by a "learned young Bohemian" appears to be the contact most likely connected with the illustration of the monster.

The content of the Velenus treatise and the content of the von Olmütz engraving are remarkably complementary. As noted in chapter 1, sectarian opponents of the papacy took a picture that was based on a popular belief and transformed it into a satiric pasquinade that condemned papal claims to secular jurisdiction. Likewise, the Velenus treatise attacked one of the main foundations

68. Jan Poduška to Luther, July 17, 1519, *WABr*, 1:416–18; Václav Rožďalovský to Luther, July 17, 1519, *ibid.*, 419–20; Luther to Johann Staupitz, October 3, 1519, *ibid.*, 514; *St.L.*, 15:1370–74, 2452; Thomson, "Luther and Bohemia" 170.

69. *St.L.*, 21a:215; *WABr*, 1:597, 598n9.

of papal jurisdiction by disputing that St. Peter was the first bishop of Rome and thus denying that the pope was the heir of St. Peter. This chapter has argued that the symbolic message of the Roman monster engraving expressed the polemical attitude of the religious radicals in Bohemia during the first two decades of the sixteenth century. The career and the writings of Ulrichus Velenus serve to illustrate this point. An examination of his life and works suggests that he is the most likely source for Luther's copy of Wenzel von Olmütz's engraving.

Velenus was born circa 1495 near Mnichov, some fifty miles north of Prague. A member of the minor gentry, he attended university in Prague, receiving his bachelor of arts degree in 1515. After graduation he continued to study the works of various humanists and learned the trade of a printer. In 1518, he began working in Mladá Boleslav (Jung-Bunzlau) at the printing press of Mikuláš Klaudián (Nicholas Claudianus), a learned physician and member of the Bohemian Brethren; Mladá Boleslav was one of the major centers for the Brethren. A year later, Velenus became an independent printer in Bělá pod Bezdězem (Weißwasser), to which he probably moved so that he could be resident on the estates of Jan Špeta of Janovice and thus come under his protection. Špeta was one of the leading noblemen of the Utraquist party, but he nevertheless offered protection to various members of the Unity.⁷⁰

From the start of his publishing career, Velenus seems to have had an agenda to publish Czech translations of books and treatises that called the concept of papal primacy into question.⁷¹ For example, he translated and published Erasmus's *Enchiridion* or *Handbook of the Christian Knight*, because, as he wrote, he felt it would provide his readers with arguments for criticism of the traditional church.⁷² He also published a Czech version of the anonymous *Julius exclusus*, a scathing attack on the warmongering of the Renaissance papacy. Another of Velenus's works was a translation of a dialogue of the ancient satirist Lucian, wherein the author argues that rich and poor, free and slave should all be treated equally,⁷³ a theme that resonated well with the Brethren.

In November 1520, Velenus published his *Petrus Romam non venisse*. Unlike most of his other works, which were Czech translations published in Bohemia, this work was written in Latin and printed in Augsburg and Basel.

70. The best biographical treatment of Velenus can be found in Lamping, *Ulrichus Velenus*, 41–69.

71. *Ibid.*, 63.

72. *Ibid.*, 51.

73. *Ibid.*, 54.

Given that the treatise was so critical of the papacy, he probably feared that it would cause embarrassment for his Utraquist patron if he published it in Bohemia. Also, he clearly wanted his work to have an impact outside as well as inside the Czech realm. Shortly after its publication, Velenus either personally delivered a copy or had a copy delivered to Martin Luther. Only three months after its publication Luther wrote to Spalatin making it clear that he had read Velenus's work.

In the *Petrum Romam non venisse*, Velenus uses copious historical and scriptural references to argue that St. Peter never traveled to Rome and was therefore never present to serve as the bishop of Rome.⁷⁴ If this contention were true, then the bishop of Rome would not be the heir of St. Peter (the *indignus haeres beati Petri*, to use Pope Leo I's term), and his claims to the power of the keys would be false. The rejection of the "heirship of the pope,"⁷⁵ with its implied rejection of the papal claims to the power of the keys, is the main point of Velenus's treatise. He thus offers a verbal articulation of the message conveyed symbolically in von Olmütz's illustration of the Roman monster. In the picture, a demonic, derisive, and defamatory monster stands in juxtaposition to an outsized cross-keys banner streaming from atop the Castel Sant'Angelo, clearly condemning papal jurisdictional claims.

Velenus is equally clear and direct. In his title he states, "It is therefore quite worthless and audacious for the Roman Pontiff to suppose that he is and to call himself the successor of Peter, etc."⁷⁶ He describes the Antichrist as being "now present in the Roman Church,"⁷⁷ and he connects the Antichrist with the Donation of Constantine when he writes, "The Antichrist, under the name of Sylvester, regarded the secular kingdom as a gift from the Emperor Constantine to himself."⁷⁸ He mentions that Lorenzo Valla has proved that the Donation of Constantine was a forgery. He uses apocalyptic diction when he queries, "Do you believe that the Church, which was founded by a poor Christ, and which was extended by poor apostles, ought to have so much wealth and power? And that in it one man should rule over everyone? The Church would then be nothing but a tyranny. Unfortunately, the Church has become just

74. For a summary of the contents of the *Petrum Romam non venisse*, see *ibid.*, 7–26.

75. The phrase "heirship of the pope" is used by Ullmann, *History of Political Thought: Middle Ages*, 25.

76. Lamping, *Ulrichus Velenus*, 7.

77. *Ibid.*

78. *Ibid.*, 118.

such a tyranny: the whore, Babylon, arrayed in purple.”⁷⁹ He exhorts, “Oh, that everyone should follow our [Bohemian] example and defect from that Babylon.”⁸⁰ And he concludes by saying that he wants to bring to light “the faults and errors of the Babylon of the West.”⁸¹

The similarity in content between the symbols in the engraving of the Roman monster and the language in the *Petrum Romam non venisse* treatise suggests that they may have been sent to Luther together. None of Luther’s other documented Bohemian contacts that occurred before February 1522 is as directly associated with the theme of the von Olmütz reproduction as the *Petrum Romam non venisse*. Furthermore, from the point of view of chronology and timing, Luther’s receipt of Velenus’s treatise occurred closest in time to the point when he first stated his awareness of the Roman monster. Ultimately, we can never know with absolute certainty how Luther acquired the picture of the Roman monster; however, the available documentation suggests that when he was given the Velenus treatise he also received a copy of the von Olmütz engraving.⁸²

Though intrigued by Velenus’s treatise, Luther was not convinced by his argument. In a letter to Spalatin, Luther calls Velenus “a learned young man” but he also notes “he does not prove [his case].”⁸³ In the long run, it was not Velenus’s treatise but rather the von Olmütz illustration that had the greatest impact on the Reformation. Luther and his colleague Melanchthon decided to use the illustration as the basis for a vituperative, antipapal propaganda pamphlet, in which Melanchthon drew on the medieval commonplace of the papal Antichrist. The meaning and historical development of the papal Antichrist topos is the subject of chapter 3.

79. Ibid.

80. Ibid., 21.

81. Ibid., 26.

82. Köhler, *Luther und die Kirchengeschichte*, 222. Köhler emphatically states, “es wird wohl sicher angenommen werden dürfen, das [sic] jener iuuenis eruditus, der ihm das Büchlein des Ulrich Velenus brachte, auch den Papstesel ihm gab.” While I agree with Köhler’s conclusion, I feel that, on the basis of the available evidence, the case must be expressed as “very likely” rather than as “certain.”

83. WABr, 2:260; and St.L., 21a:330–31. Luther did, however, take over one part of Velenus’s argument, namely, that Peter could not have been a bishop in Rome for twenty-five years, as church tradition asserted. See Lamping, *Ulrichus Velenus*, 139.

Chapter 3

The Papal Antichrist



THE EPITHET “ANTICHRIST,” USED BY PHILIP Melanchthon in his pope-ass diatribe, conveyed layers of meaning that had developed throughout the Middle Ages. Within Western Christendom, theologians, reformers, and polemicists utilized the idea of “Antichrist” to help elucidate the apocalyptic end of time, to interpret the meaning of historical and contemporary events, and to defame political and/or religious opponents. Sometimes the term functioned only as a maligning appellation, but more often it served both as a polemical smear and as part of a theoretical, interpretive construct designed to help explain historical and contemporary events in the context of an apocalyptic view of history.¹ Some authors saw the Antichrist as the deceiving evil demon that would appear at the end of time; others viewed him as a political tyrant who would oppose the pope and oppress the clergy. For some, he was a false priest who would ascend to the apostolic see; for others, Antichrist stood for the entire institution of the papacy and the hierocratic system that it symbolized. Since Melanchthon’s use is closest to this last perspective, this chapter focuses on the development of the motif of the papal Antichrist.

One can distinguish three separate phases in the evolution of the concept of the Antichrist within medieval Western Christianity associated, in turn, with Abbot Adso (ca. 910–992), the Joachimites, and John Wyclif (ca. 1335–84) and the Czech reformers. Abbot Adso summarized the received tradition for the West, laying out the basic narrative, reporting the origin, deeds, and apocalyptic end of Christ’s evil opposite. Joachim of Fiore (ca. 1135–1202) provided an interpretive schema that made it possible to use the figurative language of the book of Revelation to account for the course of history. Specifically, Joachim’s interpretation of the events of the end of time allowed the apocalyptic Final Enemy to be understood as a false pope. A variety of subsequent Joachimite interpreters used the notion of the Final Enemy as false pope to attack individual popes as the Antichrist.

1. McGinn, *Antichrist*, 120–21.

At the end of the fourteenth century, John Wyclif developed a number of interconnected theological insights that led him to conclude that the corrupt papacy of the Schism and the venal hierocratic clergy amounted to a collective Antichrist. He expressed this idea through a figure of speech that became highly influential—the Antichrist antitheses. Finally, the Czech reformers of the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries developed an elaborate theology of the collective Antichrist, which radical Hussites then applied to the papacy, using an expanded and thoroughly documented version of Wyclif’s Antichrist antitheses. The Hussites also developed an extensive anatomical metaphor for describing the monstrosity of the Antichrist. Thus, when Melancthon called the pope-ass a *figura* of the Antichrist, he understood multiple meanings: theological, apocalyptic, historical, polemical, and antipapal.

The Received Tradition: Abbot Adso

The Bible contains four specific references to the Antichrist as well as several other passages traditionally construed as referring to him. The specific references are 1 John 2:18, 2:22, and 4:3, and 2 John 7. Other passages traditionally understood as referring to Antichrist (but without using the term) are 2 Thessalonians 2:3–8, Revelation 13 and 19:20, Matthew 24, and Daniel 8 and 9:27. These scriptural references establish that the Antichrist is the Evil One who comes at the end of time, that he denies the incarnation of Christ, that his reign has already begun, and that there is more than one Antichrist, for the Antichrist has minions who come before him that are also referred to as Antichrists. Beyond these general points scripture gives little other detail about the Final Enemy.

A much more elaborate version of the Antichrist legend became available to the West thanks to the West Frankish monk Adso, abbot of Montier-en-Der. In about 950 he composed his *Letter on the Origin and Life of Antichrist*, addressed to Gerberga, the sister of Emperor Otto I and the wife of Louis IV of the West Franks. Drawing on patristic and Byzantine sources,² Abbot Adso portrays the life of Antichrist as a parody of the life of Jesus. The Antichrist’s parents are Jews from the tribe of Dan. At the moment of his conception the devil enters his mother’s womb; he thus becomes thoroughly wicked and is known as the “Son of Perdition.” Born in Babylon, as a boy he has magicians, enchanter, and wizards who tutor him in evil. As a young man he

2. Ibid., 312n120. For an English translation of Adso’s letter, see McGinn, *Apocalyptic Spirituality*, 89–96; McGinn, *Visions of the End*, 84–87.

goes to Jerusalem. There, in a mock parallel to Jesus, he circumcises himself and pretends to be the Son of God. He sets up his throne in the holy temple and converts kings and princes to his cause. With their help he tries to convert the rest of the people. In his efforts to proselytize, he performs signs and wonders, calling fire down from heaven and making the sea first stormy and then becalmed. He even raises the dead. God sends the prophets Enoch and Elijah back into the world to defend the faithful but Antichrist manages to slay them. Thereafter, he persecutes the remaining Christians, making them either martyrs or apostates. He tortures the people of God for three and a half years and then Jesus intervenes to slay him. The Lord then gives the elect forty days to do penance if they were led astray. Following this period of penance, Judgment Day arrives, though no one can know when that will be.³

This biography provided the medieval West with a convenient summary of received knowledge about the Antichrist. But the legend acquired a much more elaborate interpretation in the work of Joachim of Fiore, a Calabrian abbot who was the most original and influential apocalyptic thinker of the high Middle Ages. A brilliant scriptural exegete, Joachim reinterpreted Adso's biography, tying the story of Antichrist to an explanation of the historical process. He thereby provided a theoretical framework, terminology, and analytical categories that proved influential on many subsequent interpreters of the legend.⁴

Joachim of Fiore and the Joachimites

Joachim was born about 1135 in Calabria, the son of a notary who worked at the Sicilian court. His family expected him to follow his father's career, but after a pilgrimage to the Holy Land he decided on a religious life. He was ordained and entered a Benedictine monastery, but later withdrew to found his own order.⁵ In his writings, Joachim reconceptualized the story of salvation, adding a Trinitarian approach to the customary dual periodization of Old Testament/New Testament, law/gospel. Christian historical thought traditionally conceived of time in a linear way; the story of salvation began

3. This epitome of Adso's letter is based on the translation given in McGinn, *Apocalyptic Spirituality*, 89–96.

4. Lerner, "Antichrists and Antichrist in Joachim of Fiore," 569, 569–70n54.

5. Summaries of Joachim's thought and assessments of his historical influence can be found in McGinn, *Antichrist*, 135–142; Douie, *Nature and Effect of the Heresy of the Fraticelli*, 23–48; Leff, *Heresy in the Later Middle Ages*, 1:68–83; McGinn, *Apocalyptic Spirituality*, 97–148; McGinn, *Calabrian Abbot*; Reeves, *Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages*; Reeves and Hirsch-Reich, *Figurae of Joachim of Fiore*.

with the Fall, progressed toward the Incarnation, and would end with the Second Coming. Joachim assumed that the triune God was imbedded within the world he had created; there is, therefore, a connection between the course of history and the Trinity. In his system, each person of the Trinity has its own era (or *status*, to use Joachim's term). The first *status*, from Adam to Christ, is the era of God the Father. The second *status*, from King Josiah to the present, is the time of God the Son. The third *status* proceeds from the first two, is ascribed to the Holy Spirit, and is to be a period of moral renewal led by monks. It begins with St. Benedict and lasts until the end of the world.⁶

Joachim's concept of history was not only Trinitarian, it was also apocalyptic. Though he avoided making precise predictions, "the inner logic of his thought demanded that the end of the second *status* be realized soon after 1200."⁷ As he wrote in his "Letter to All the Faithful," the end of the second *status* "will not take place in the days of your grandchildren or in the old age of your children, but in your own days, few and evil."⁸ In this apocalyptic philosophy of history, the legend of the Antichrist was central. Joachim explained his view of the Antichrist through an explication of the seven-headed dragon in Revelation 12.⁹ The seven heads represent seven tyrannical persecutors of the church, namely Herod, Nero, Constantius (Constantius II [337–361], the Arian emperor), Mohammed, Mesemoth (a North African Moorish ruler),¹⁰ Saladin, and "the Seventh King, who is properly called Antichrist."¹¹

Joachim's exegesis was innovative in several ways. His Trinitarian periodization challenged the role of the church; by recasting the Christian concept of time into three rather than two divisions, Joachim implicitly displaced the church and the sacraments with a new dispensation in the third era.¹² He historicized not only the Trinity but also the apocalypse and the Antichrist. For Joachim, the sixth head of the red dragon (Rev. 12:3) was Saladin, who was leading the Saracens in war against the Christians (Jerusalem fell

6. This Trinitarian periodization is explained in the *Book of Concordance*, bk. 2, pt. 1, chaps. 5–12, translated in McGinn, *Apocalyptic Spirituality*, 124–34. See also the *Exposition on the Apocalypse*, excerpted and translated in McGinn, *Visions of the End*, 133–34.

7. McGinn, *Antichrist*, 138.

8. McGinn, *Apocalyptic Spirituality*, 117.

9. This explication is presented in Joachim's *Book of the Figures*, "The Fourteenth Table, the Seven-Headed Dragon," translated in *ibid.*, 136–41.

10. *Ibid.*, 294n5.

11. *Ibid.*, 136.

12. Leff, *Heresy in the Later Middle Ages*, 1:76.

in 1187). The seventh head of the dragon, that would make common cause with the sixth head, had already been born. This “Seventh-Head” Antichrist, acting as the evil reverse of Christ, would pose as prophet, priest, and king. He would thus embody “the worst imaginable Western corporate dangers—a depraved royalty and a depraved papacy. . . .”¹³ Joachim did not perceive the Jews as a threat; he therefore broke with the topos of the Antichrist as a Jew from the tribe of Dan. Instead, Joachim made him into a false priest or a false pope. While he did not characterize the institution of the papacy or any individual pope as the Antichrist, his idea that the Final Enemy would be a false pope encouraged others whom he influenced to develop the notion of the papal Antichrist.¹⁴ By interpreting the figures and events of the apocalypse in historical terms, Joachim provided an approach for later theologians and visionaries to apply the Antichrist legend to historical and contemporary events. The Spiritual Franciscans provide a good example of the use of the Antichrist as a polemical weapon against the papacy of their day.

The Papal-Franciscan Controversy

The question of ownership and use of property had become a matter of contention among the Franciscans while St. Francis (1182–1226) was still alive. Francis of Assisi envisioned his order as embracing poverty without reservation or compromise. This, however, proved impractical. The protector of the Franciscan order and its chief proponent at the papal court was Ugolino (the nephew of Pope Innocent III and the future Pope Gregory IX). He proposed drawing a distinction between ownership and use of property. Shortly after St. Francis’s death (1226), Gregory IX issued a bull known as *Quo elongate*, which interpreted the Franciscan rule so as to allow the friars to have “use” of houses, furniture, and books, though these were to remain the “possessions” of the donors.¹⁵ This interpretation did not please all of the friars. In the mid-thirteenth century, a faction that later came to be known as the Spirituals insisted on shunning the comfort of a convent, living lives of poverty without homes or property. Their opponents within the order were known as Conventuals. By the end of the century, a Franciscan Conventual became Pope Nicholas IV (1288–1292). He was especially harsh in his efforts to suppress the Spirituals.

13. Lerner, “Antichrists and Antichrist,” 568.

14. McGinn, *Antichrist*, 142.

15. Lester K. Little, “Franciscans,” in *DMA*, 5:198.

One of the major voices for the Spirituals at this time was Ubertino of Casale, who taught in Florence and preached in Tuscany around 1300. He is best known for his *Arbor vitae crucifixae*, a kind of prose epic of the life and passion of Christ together with a commentary on the apocalypse that shows strong Joachimite influences.¹⁶ In this work Ubertino is highly critical of Pope Boniface VIII (1294–1303), calling him “not only the mystic Antichrist but the beast arising out of the sea, whose seven heads represented the seven deadly sins, while his ten horns were his infringements of the Ten Commandments.”¹⁷

With the election of Pope Clement V (1305–14), matters improved for the Spirituals, for he showed them greater sympathy and actively worked to reintegrate the two Franciscan factions. Following Clement, however, matters took a much more ominous turn with the election of Pope John XXII (1316–34). In 1317 he issued a bull, *Sancta Romana*, essentially declaring war against the Spirituals. He condemned their principles and imprisoned or executed their leaders. Not satisfied with the suppression of the Spirituals, Pope John turned against the Conventuals as well. In so doing, he disputed the fundamental Franciscan teaching that Jesus and the apostles had lived lives of poverty and that this therefore provided a justification for the Franciscans’ rejection of property. Franciscan evangelical poverty served as a kind of living condemnation of the wealth of the church and the papacy. For John XXII, matters worsened when his political nemesis, Emperor Louis IV of Bavaria (1314–1347), condemned him for his opposition to evangelical poverty and emerged as the champion of the Spirituals and the dissident Conventuals, who felt betrayed by John’s condemnation of apostolic poverty. These two groups of dissident Franciscans came to be loosely referred to as Fraticelli. In the war of words that accompanied this dispute, the Fraticelli began to call John XXII a false pope and Antichrist.¹⁸

By the mid-fourteenth century the Fraticelli could be found in Tuscany, Umbria, the Marches of Ancona, the Kingdom of Naples, and elsewhere in

16. Douie, *Nature and Effect of the Heresy of the Fraticelli*, 133.

17. Ibid., 139. The phrase “mystic Antichrist” derives from Peter John Olivi (ca. 1248–98), a colleague and friend of Ubertino, who wrote a *Commentary on Revelation* in which he interpreted the Antichrist as twofold: the *Antichristus mysticus* and the *Antichristus magnus*. For Olivi, the *Antichristus mysticus* consists of both evil laity and wicked clergy within Christianity; McGinn, *Antichrist*, 160.

18. Ibid., 165–66; McGinn, *Visions of the End*, 207–8, 234; McGinn, *Apocalyptic Spirituality*, 149–82; Douie, *Nature and Effect of the Heresy of the Fraticelli*, 209–47; Lester K. Little, “Franciscans,” in *DMA*, 5:202–4.

Italy. In 1354 the Fraticelli of Campania wrote a letter to the citizens of Narni in Umbria, asking them to help some Fraticelli imprisoned by the Conventuals. The hyperbolic tone of this letter makes it one of the most forceful examples of Fraticelli use of the papal Antichrist epithet. It reads, in part:

The Abomination of Desolation is the principal source from which have come all the temporal and spiritual evils that have reigned, remained, and are grown wonderfully strong in the world for a long time now. Among them are a manner of life that is bestial, voluptuous, brutal, vain, wanton, puffed-up, unclean, polluted, stinking, and carnal, as well as innumerable wars among Christians, earthquakes, accomplished slaughter, and the famines and pestilences there have been. We are still in fear of many evils shortly to come unless God provides a remedy. All the ills just mentioned and many others have their origin, foundation, and root in the Abomination of Desolation which today rules in the holy place, that is, the Church. What is this Abomination of Desolation which stands in the holy place, the Church? We respond with a sorrowful soul that this Abomination of Desolation is the condemnation of the life of Christ, of his poverty and that of his apostles made by Pope John XXII thirty years ago and confirmed through his supporters in a variety of ways. . . .

. . . Therefore Christ says in Matthew 24:15: "Let him who reads understand," that is, let him read in such a way that he understands lest he be led into error and eternal damnation by the Abomination. Do we not see what Christ said there about false Christs, that is, false pontiffs and prelates, arising, and also about false prophets, that is, false teachers and doctors, fulfilled almost to the letter? It will not be completely fulfilled until the Great Antichrist comes. Without doubt we await him very soon, because John and all his supporters without number are his messengers and chief disciples. . . .¹⁹

The history of the Fraticelli during the later fourteenth and fifteenth centuries is a sad story of persecutions and executions. The Great Schism (1378–1415) brought them some respite, but with the reestablishment of a strong papacy in Italy, efforts at their extirpation began again. Indeed, two Observan-

19. McGinn, *Visions of the End*, 237–38, 337n27; Douie, *Nature and Effect of the Heresy of the Fraticelli*, 221–22.

tine Franciscans became inquisitors with the specific charge of stamping out the Fraticelli. By the 1460s these efforts were essentially successful.

The Franciscan Spirituals and the Fraticelli were struggling against the condemnation of their ideals by Pope John XXII; in so doing, they made use of the language and ideology of the Joachimite tradition. At the end of the fourteenth century a new papal critic came into prominence, namely, John Wyclif. Like the Franciscan dissidents, he made use of some of the terms of the Joachimite tradition. He did not, however, embrace the ideology or the historical interpretation that Joachim had put forward.²⁰ Rather, he developed his own theological doctrines that in turn provided intellectual support for his antipapal polemics. Additionally, a series of specific events served to radicalize his thinking about the pope. By the end of his life, he had rejected the popes of the Schism and had concluded that they were the Antichrist. He articulated his criticism of the papacy through a series of antitheses that proved to be quite influential both on the Hussite movement and on the Lutheran Reformation.

John Wyclif

John Wyclif spent most of his professional career as a teacher of philosophy and theology at Oxford.²¹ During his life, England was greatly influenced by two historical realities—the Hundred Years’ War (1337–1453) and the Avignonese papacy (1305–78). The former resulted in financial strains that led to talk of clerical taxation and ecclesiastical disendowment. The latter led to resentments toward popes perceived as extravagant, Francophile, and exploitative, who bestowed rich English benefices on foreigners who never came near England.²²

In this context, Wyclif developed theological and ecclesiological ideas that both anticipated and influenced future efforts at religious reform. He defined the true church as the congregation of the predestinate (*congregatio omnium predestinatorum*). The actual, visible church of the pope and clerical hierarchy was not necessarily identical to the true church, because only God could know who was predestined. For Wyclif, a believer’s salvation no longer depended upon his connection to the visible church or the mediation of

20. Workman, *John Wyclif*, 2:99.

21. The best discussion of Wyclif within the Scholastic tradition at Oxford is Robson, *Wyclif and the Oxford Schools*.

22. Matthew, “Introduction,” in Wyclif, *English Works*, viii; Trevelyan, *England in the Age of Wycliffe*, 117.

the priesthood. The edicts of the actual church need only be followed if they conformed to God's will and if those issuing the edicts demonstrated, by their lives, that they were members of the true church.²³

This uniting of legitimate authority with a godly life is closely related to one of Wyclif's best-known ideas, his theory of the dominion of grace.²⁴ Briefly stated, the doctrine holds that legitimate lordship or *dominium* belongs to God. Men receive grants of dominion from God by divine grace so that they can perform their functions in society. There can be "no dominion without grace" and "conversely mortal sin in destroying grace destroy[s] dominion."²⁵ For a man properly to exercise authority he must render service to God by living a God-pleasing, righteous life. Only God can judge a man's righteousness, but those who commit mortal sin clearly forfeit their legitimate dominion.²⁶ Although this doctrine could apply equally well to religious and secular authorities, Wyclif focused its implications mainly on the clergy.

Wyclif's theological ideas were closely related to his critical stance toward the papacy and papal authority. Yet it was not so much the logical implications of his doctrines as it was the effect of a series of events that served to galvanize him into vocal opposition to the papacy. In 1377, Pope Gregory XI (1371–78) condemned Wyclif and attempted to have him arrested and held as a papal prisoner. In 1378, the calamitous Great Schism of the papacy began. The ongoing vitriolic and violent struggle between Urban VI (1378–89) and Clement VII (1378–94), the personal excesses and ill-considered policies of Pope Urban, and England's involvement in an unsuccessful military campaign on behalf of Urban (known as Spenser's Crusade, 1383) motivated Wyclif to a fierce attack against the papacy.²⁷

During the last six years of his life, Wyclif wrote a number of antipapal tracts.²⁸ In the first of these, *De potestate pape* (1379),²⁹ he praised apostolic

23. "Wyclif, John," in *DMA*, 12:708; and Workman, *John Wyclif*, 2:12.

24. Kaminsky, "Wyclifism as Ideology of Revolution," 64–66; Leff, *Heresy in the Later Middle Ages*, 2:546–49.

25. *Ibid.*, 2:547.

26. "Wyclif, John," in *DMA*, 12:707; Matthew, "Introduction," in Wyclif, *English Works*, xxxiv.

27. Workman, *John Wyclif*, 2:74.

28. Wyclif "often prepared a triple series of writings—one a lengthy Latin treatise, addressed to a Scholastic audience; the second a short Latin summary intended for a lettered but less leisured circle of readers; the third a popular presentation of his ideas in English. Such a series may be found in *De potestate pape*, *De ordine christiano*, and *De papa*; Winn, "Introduction," in Wyclif: *Select English Writings*, xxx.

29. The text is edited and annotated in Wyclif, *Tractatus de potestate pape*, ed. Loserth. For the dating of *De potestate pape*, see especially Loserth, "Introduction," in *ibid.*, lii. See also Workman, *John Wyclif*, 2:74–79.

poverty as an appropriate standard for judging the holiness of the popes, urged the popes to renounce temporal authority and temporal splendor, rejected the doctrines of Petrine supremacy and the power of the keys, contrasted the characteristics of the Antichrist (and the schismatic popes) with the example of the life of Christ,³⁰ and condemned the popes of the Schism as Antichrists. In this work, Wyclif did not categorically reject Pope Urban, though he was highly critical of him. In sum, the gist of *De potestate pape* was that the church did not need a pope for its existence.³¹

In a shorter work probably written later that same year, *De ordine christiano*,³² Wyclif gave a digest of *De potestate pape*, focusing primarily on whether the church needed the papacy. The *De papa*,³³ written in English, dated from either 1379 or 1380; it provided a summary of the main points of these two Latin works. In late 1383 or early 1384 he wrote *De Christo et suo adversario Antichristo*.³⁴ This work reflected Wyclif's most strident position, which he reached after having observed several years of contention between Urban and Clement and after witnessing Spenser's Crusade. Shortly before his death he wrote "Of Antichrist and his Meynee" (ca. 1384).³⁵

In these works, Wyclif used apocalyptic concepts to explain the meaning of the Great Schism. He adopted terms and phrases from the medieval Antichrist tradition, but placed them in a new interpretive construct centered on his doctrines of predestination and the dominion of grace. To argue that the

30. Wyclif, *Tractatus de potestate pape*, ed. Loserth, chap. 6, 120–25. This is the earliest listing of the Antichrist antitheses of which I am aware. Here Wyclif lists eleven characteristics; in the version discussed in greater detail below he expands this number to twelve.

31. Loserth, "Introduction," in Wyclif, *Tractatus de potestate pape*, liv.

32. The text of *De ordine christiano* is in Wyclif, *Opera minora*, 129–39; see also Loserth, "Introduction," in *ibid.*, xxii–xxiv.

33. The text of *De papa* is in Wyclif, *English Works*, ed. Matthew, 460–82. It should be noted that Anne Hudson, "Wyclif," in *DMA*, 12:710, questions the reliable attribution of all of Wyclif's vernacular writings. Workman, *John Wyclif*, 1, app. C, 331, addresses the authenticity of the vernacular works with the comment, "the reader should remember that the [English] writings are genuine enough as far as matter goes; the voice is the voice of Wyclif though the hand is not always his. We must remember that if Wyclif dictated the scribe would pen it in his own dialect." Matthew, "Introduction" and annotation in Wyclif, *English Works*, xlix, 458; Workman, *John Wyclif*, 2:81n3; Winn, "Introduction," in Wyclif, *Select English Writings*, xxxiv, all argue for the authenticity of *De papa*.

34. This treatise is available with critical commentary and notes in two locations: Buddenseig "Johann Wiclif's *De Christo et adversario suo Antichristo*" (for comments on authenticity and dating, see esp. p. 19). See also *De Christo et suo adversario Antichristo* in Wyclif, *Polemical Works in Latin*, ed. Buddenseig, 2:633–92 (for comments on authenticity and dating, see esp. 2:637–41).

35. "Of Antichrist and his Meynee," in Wyclif, *Three Treatises*, ed. Todd, cxv–cliv.

papacy of the Schism was the Antichrist, he developed a series of twelve antitheses between Christ and the deceiving Evil One. In using apocalypticism to interpret historic events, Wyclif was not unlike Abbot Adso, Abbot Joachim, or the Spiritual Franciscans, but his frame of reference was quite different from that of Adso or the Joachimites. His conclusions were that the Schism was a sign of the imminent end of the world, that the actions of the popes indicated that they were the Antichrist, that good Christians should therefore withhold obedience from them, and that the church really did not need the papacy. He even asserted that the Schism was positive in that it provided God an opportunity to reveal himself to mankind by beheading the Antichrist.³⁶ He thus used the concept of Antichrist both as an interpretive construct and as a term of abuse for condemning incarnate evil.

Wyclif based his arguments against the papacy on his teachings of predestination and dominion of grace. He believed that Christianity is divided between those foreknown to damnation and those predestined to be members of the true church. Only God can know who is foreknown and who predestined, but Christians may tentatively assume the predestination of others based on their deeds of holiness. Furthermore, according to the idea of dominion of grace, all legitimate authority comes from God through his Holy Spirit and is given only to the righteous. Those who commit mortal sin lose their legitimate dominion. St. Peter became Christ's vicar because he lived a Christlike life. But that authority was Peter's alone. The primacy of the pope is based upon a primacy of character—living a life of righteousness in imitation of the values and virtues of Christ. A pope's sanctity and deeds of holiness can convince Christendom both of his predestination and of his legitimate dominion. But a pope who departs from the holy ways of Christ condemns himself as the Antichrist.³⁷

In order to portray the sinfulness of the popes of the Schism, Wyclif developed twelve characteristics of the sanctity of Christ; he then contrasted these with the actions and demeanor of the popes. These twelve antitheses are

1. Christ is the truth; the pope is the principle of falsehood and lies, in words, writings, and works.

36. Wyclif, *De papa*, in *English Works*, ed. Matthew, 461–62.

37. Wyclif insisted that a "true" pope ought to fulfill the thirty-four characteristics that St. Bernard recommended to Pope Eugene III (1145–53); see Wyclif, *De potestate pape*, ed. Loserth, xxx, 269–70; Workman, *John Wyclif*, 2:77. See also Bernard of Clairvaux, *Five Books on Consideration*, trans. Anderson and Kennan, 137–38.

2. Christ embraced a life of poverty; the pope seeks worldly magnificence.
3. Christ embodied meekness and humility; the pope demonstrates pride and cruelty, sending a crusade against his enemies.
4. Christ's law is perfect and sufficient; the pope introduces new cruel laws with which he oppresses the faithful.
5. Christ exhorted missionary zeal; the pope and his followers reign in gorgeous palaces or shut themselves up in monasteries.
6. Christ renounced secular power; the pope claims dominion over all earthly kingdoms.
7. Christ obeyed the emperor, paid the tribute money [Matt. 17:23–26], and taught his disciples to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's [Matt. 22:21]; the pope subverts and weakens secular authorities.
8. Christ chose twelve honest, plain, poor men as his disciples; the pope chooses crafty, ambitious, worldly men as his cardinals.
9. Christ suffered for his followers; the pope exhorts to war.
10. Christ confined his mission to Judea; the pope sends his emissaries into every land in order to expand his power.
11. Christ lived without pomp and was always ready to serve; the pope has a magnificent court and demands homage, even from the emperor.
12. Christ despised worldly fame and wealth; the pope considers everything as marketable.³⁸

In *De potestate pape, De Christo et suo adversario Antichristo, De papa*, and “Of Antichrist and his Meynee,” Wyclif gave numerous examples to illustrate these contrasts between Christ and the pope.

The moral turpitude of the schismatic popes and the degradation of the late medieval hierarchical church elicited Wyclif's initial criticism of the papacy, but he quickly moved from excoriating individual popes to condemning the whole papacy as an institution. As he wrote in his *Opus evangelicum*, “The pope is the evident [*patulus*] Antichrist, not just the individual person who sets up more laws that are against Christ's law, but the multitude of popes from the time of the Church's endowment—and of cardinals, bishops, and their other accomplices. The person of Antichrist is a monstrous composite one.”³⁹

38. On the Antichrist antitheses, see Buddensieg, *Wyclif's Polemical Works*, 636–37; Buddensieg, “Wyclif's *De Christo et adversario suo Antichristo*,” 17–18.

39. Quoted in McGinn, *Antichrist*, 182. See also Patschovsky, “‘Antichrist’ bei Wyclif,” esp. 91.

The notion of the Antichrist as a collective phenomenon developed along a parallel track in the teachings of the native Czech reformers—the leaders of an indigenous movement of moral reform in fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century Bohemia. The work of the earliest leaders of the Czech reform actually predated the arrival of Wyclif's writings in Prague, even though their ideas were similar to his in many ways. When Wyclif's teachings arrived in Bohemia, they enjoyed quick acceptance among the Czech reformers.

The Czech Reform—The Collective Antichrist

The pre-Hussite and early Hussite reformers developed the concept of a collective Antichrist, making it into an instrument of moral reform and placing it within an historical interpretation that was critical of papalism, the policies of popes such as Gregory VII or Innocent III who used the power of the keys and the position of vicar of Christ to put forward claims to both spiritual and temporal jurisdiction. They drew on a variety of medieval authors and traditions and honed the figure of the Antichrist into a sharp weapon for anti-papal attack. In so doing, they developed metaphors, figures of speech, and a specialized vocabulary that not only articulated the Antichrist as a composite phenomenon, but also developed the Antichrist antitheses as a polemical trope, and introduced an anatomical metaphor as an expression of the Antichrist's wicked traits. One must therefore turn next to the themes of the collective or "mystical" Antichrist, to the Antichrist antitheses, and to the metaphorical "anatomy" of the Antichrist in order fully to understand the levels of meaning conveyed by the term "Antichrist" when used as an epithet against the pope.

The "father" of the Czech reform was John Milíč of Kroměříž (Kremsier) in Moravia (ca. 1325–74). A tireless preacher, moral reformer, and charismatic St. Francis-like figure, Milíč introduced to the Bohemians the notion of the collective Antichrist. He taught that Antichrist took the form of wickedness within Christendom, especially on the part of corrupt, hypocritical clergy. He led a preaching ministry of moral regeneration using the figure of the Antichrist as one of his rhetorical weapons. Having been a successful bureaucrat in Emperor Charles IV's chancery, Milíč decided to take holy orders, renounce wealth and worldly position, embrace poverty, and become a full-time preacher, first in the languages of Czech and Latin and later in German as well. He railed against clergy who purchased their offices, held multiple offices, kept concubines, and lived in luxury. He was especially intolerant of the laxity of the mendicant orders.

In his sermons, Milíč made use of the language of Antichrist eschatology. At first he conceived of the Antichrist as a specific individual, but later he came to see the Antichrist in more general terms, as a symbol for anyone who opposed the regeneration of society along the lines of primitive apostolic Christianity.⁴⁰

In his *Libellus de Antichristo* (*Little Book on the Antichrist*), Milíč assumed the prophetic voice of one who is filled with the Holy Spirit. He described the Antichrist as a composite or collective, “I said to the Spirit, which spake within me, Who is Antichrist? And he answered, There are many Antichrists. He who denies Christ, and the authority of Christ, is an Antichrist. And as many who say they know him [Christ], deny him by their works, while others deny him by keeping still and not daring to confess him and the truth of his cause before men; conclude from this who is Antichrist.”⁴¹ For Milíč, this collective Antichrist was not something to await in the future, but rather a reality already present. The abomination of desolation of which Christ speaks in Matthew 24:15, Milíč interpreted as corruption in the Church—ecclesiastical wealth, clerical luxury and concubinage, simony, pluralism, sale of the sacraments, negligent clergy, monks hearing confession without license, and widespread hypocrisy.

While Milíč’s *Libellus de Antichristo* thundered against sin and especially against the failings of the secular and regular clergy, it did not condemn the pope as Antichrist. Rather, Milíč interpreted contemporary conditions in an eschatological framework and called for a corrupt church to be renewed by a great spiritual awakening and thus be prepared for the Second Coming and the end of time. It is important to remember that Milíč was writing during the Avignonese papacy, before the Great Schism. While he wanted Urban V to return to Rome, he still could envision him as the leader of his wished-for spiritual renewal of the church.

The best known of the followers of Milíč was Matthew of Janov. In his collection of works known as *Regulae veteris et novi testamenti* (*The Rules of the Old and the New Testament*), he developed Milíč’s concept of a collective Antichrist into a much more elaborate and systematic construct, placing it in

40. Matthew of Janov preserved Milíč’s work by including it in his *Regulae veteris et novi testamenti*; see Matthew of Janov, *Regulae*, ed. Kybal, 3:368–81. See also Neander, *General History*, 5:178–80; Preuss, *Die Vorstellungen vom Antichrist*, 50n4; Kaminsky, *History of the Hussite Revolution*, 10–11; Nechutová, “Eschatologie in Böhmen vor Hus,” 63–65.

41. John Milíč, *Libellus de Antichristo*, in Matthew of Janov, *Regulae*, ed. Kybal, 3:376; Neander, *General History*, 179.

an historical context.⁴² A well-educated man, Matthew studied in Paris from 1373 to 1381. There he earned the master of arts degree in three years and then devoted the rest of his time to studying theology, though without completing his doctorate. His years abroad earned him the title *Magister Parisiensis*—the Parisian master. Drawing on his formal theological training, Matthew provided a theoretical foundation to justify, promote, systematize, and perpetuate the Milíčian reform. He did this in his magnum opus, the *Regulae*. This rather prolix work is, in fact, a collection of treatises in which Matthew laid out a “radical critique of contemporary papalism and the papal system,”⁴³ and elaborated upon the concept of the collective Antichrist.

Matthew presented a vision of Antichrist that was contemporary, contextualized, and collective. He described the Antichrist as a present evil, not one that would arrive only at some point in the distant future. Further, Matthew placed the Antichrist in an historical context, using terms that were barely veiled references to the anti-Milíčian clergy of Prague or to the papacy.⁴⁴ But the historical frame of reference was much broader than the reform controversy in Bohemia. Matthew cast the Antichrist as a wickedness that had grown in magnitude since the victory of papal domination over the church and secular society.⁴⁵

For Matthew, Antichrist was a collective phenomenon, comprised of pseudo-Christians who embodied hypocrisy, avarice, and concupiscence. Under the sham of holiness, the members of this composite Antichrist practiced religious rituals and external observances, undertook pilgrimages, venerated saints’ relics, believed in satanic wonders, promoted the endowment of purgatory masses, encouraged the sale of indulgences, and devoted themselves to the study of canon law to the neglect of scripture, all the while living

42. The best discussions of Matthew of Janov are Kaminsky, *History of the Hussite Revolution*, 14–23; Kaminsky, “On the Sources of Matthew of Janov’s Doctrine”; Spinka, *John Hus’ Concept of the Church*, 16–21; Preuss, *Vorstellungen vom Antichrist*, 50–51; Betts, “Some Political Ideas of the Early Czech Reformers,” 25–26; Nechutová, “Eschatologie in Böhmen vor Hus,” 65–67; Neander, “Über Matthias von Janov als Vorläufer,” 92–111; Neander, *General History*, 192–235.

43. Kaminsky, “Sources of Matthew of Janov’s Doctrine,” 1176.

44. Matthew of Janov, *Regulae*, ed. Kybal, 3:4–5, 8, 10, 17. Matthew speculated that Pope Clement VII, the schismatic pope of Avignon, might be the great Antichrist (*summus Antichristus*) that would come at the end of time. However, throughout the *Regulae*, his emphasis was on the collective rather than the individual Antichrist. See Töpfer, “Chiliasmatische Elemente in der Eschatologie des Matthias von Janov,” 62.

45. Kaminsky, *History of the Hussite Revolution*, 21; Matthew of Janov, *Regulae*, ed. Kybal, 3:21–23.

lives of carnality and cupidity. The Antichrist knew that he was doing evil, but did it anyway, hiding his wickedness behind the appearance of holiness.⁴⁶

To describe this multifarious composite of sinfulness Matthew used the term “mystical body of Antichrist,”⁴⁷ thereby appropriating a concept that can be traced back to the African Donatist Tyconius (ca. 330–ca. 390), and can be found in the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas and in the work of the Scholastic theologian and Spiritual Franciscan Peter Olivi (ca. 1248–1298), who was the first to coin the phrase “Antichristus mysticus” as a description of the “body of evildoers within Christianity.”⁴⁸ In his schema, the mystical Antichrist comprised carnal laity, wicked clergy, an evil emperor, and a false pope.⁴⁹ In fact, Olivi was one of the first to attribute a central role to the papal Antichrist. Within the prophetic tradition of the Franciscan Joachimites, the members of the mystical Antichrist are precursors, or *figurae*, of the *Antichristus literalis et proprius* (literal and proper Antichrist). Just as the mystical body of Christ is the church, so the mystical body of Antichrist consists of heretics, unbelievers, and profligates within Christendom.

Matthew’s vision of Antichrist was a sophisticated abstraction. He identified Antichrist with hypocrisy, which he understood as “every use of the good or of apparent good . . . that makes men so satisfied with themselves or with other men as to draw them away from true humility of heart.”⁵⁰ Using this definition, Matthew attacked the introduction of secular values into the church, which he dated circa 1200, meaning thereby the efforts of Innocent III to implement the Hildebrandine system of papal supremacy in both the spiritual and the temporal sphere. Matthew’s “ideal was the primitive church, but practically speaking he was calling for a return to the pre-Hildebrandine system, before Antichrist had gained his control over the Roman institution.”⁵¹ Howard Kaminsky characterizes Matthew’s program not as “antipapal” but rather as “antipapalist.”⁵² In other words, Matthew was not opposed to all popes, but rather to the secularizing effect on the church that came

46. Matthew of Janov, *Regulae*, ed. Kybal, 3:3–4, 7, 14, 16, 18–19.

47. *Ibid.*, 3:12.

48. McGinn, *Antichrist*, 160.

49. *Ibid.*, 326n52.

50. Quoted in Kaminsky, “Sources of Matthew of Janov’s Doctrine,” 1179.

51. Kaminsky, *History of the Hussite Revolution*, 21.

52. *Ibid.*

from papal efforts to dominate the world, and “the resulting permeation of the church by the world.”⁵³

Matthew envisioned pious preaching and frequent Communion as the means that would lead to the defeat of Antichrist. The Prague Synod of 1388 contravened frequent Communion and even forced Matthew publicly to recant his own belief in its importance. He and his fellow reformers, however, still counted on preaching to effect reform. It was in the sermonizing of Czech preachers that the next stage in the development of the papal Antichrist theme took place. This was made possible by the endowment of a special chapel dedicated to preaching in the Czech language, the famous Bethlehem Chapel. This institution gave an essential forum for men like John Hus and his fellow reformer Jakoubek of Stříbro (Jacobellus of Mies) to explain and popularize notions about the Antichrist.⁵⁴

In 1391 two supporters of John Milíč, one a royal councilor, the other a well-to-do merchant, founded the chapel, so named because of the accepted etymology that “Bethlehem” meant “house of bread,” the purpose of the chapel being to feed the hearers the Word of God, the “bread of life.” The chapel’s *raison d’être* was to provide a venue for preaching in the Czech language. Prior to its foundation, preaching in Prague was done almost exclusively either in Latin or in German. As the foundation charter states, “Preachers in Czech are, for the most part, forced to make use of houses and hiding places.”⁵⁵ Clearly, a location for Czech preaching was much needed. Able to accommodate nearly three thousand souls, the chapel attracted throngs of churchgoers, including not only artisans and members of the lower classes but also representatives of the nobility and intelligentsia. In the early years of the fifteenth century, first John Hus (1402) and then Jakoubek of Stříbro (1412) held the position of preacher at Bethlehem Chapel. Through their work one can gain insight into how the abstruse ideas of Matthew of Janov evolved into popular antipapal epithets.⁵⁶

Hus’s leadership of the Czech reform, and especially his preaching at Bethlehem Chapel, helped create an atmosphere of revolutionary agitation for reform of the church in which the people literally took to the streets to demand change. Hus preached against the vices of the clergy, condemned

53. *Ibid.*, 19.

54. Odložilík, “Chapel of Bethlehem in Prague,” 125–41; Spinka, *John Hus’ Concept of the Church*, 47–51.

55. *Ibid.*, 50.

56. The ideas of John Wyclif were also a very important influence on the thinking of John Hus and Jakoubek of Stříbro.

the Donation of Constantine as the beginning of papal wealth, pomp, and corruption,⁵⁷ contrasted the holy life of Christ with the sinful life of the pope, and called for a return to the perfection of the primitive church before it was corrupted by claims of secular jurisdiction. When he was accused of having called the pope the Antichrist, he replied that he had not done so, though he admitted that he did say that a pope “who sold benefices, who was arrogant, greedy, and otherwise contrary to Christ in way of life, was Antichrist.”⁵⁸ In his *De ecclesia* he wrote, “As for antichrist occupying the papal chair, it is evident that a pope living contrary to Christ, like any other perverted person, is called by common consent antichrist.”⁵⁹ When accused of having called the curia the synagogue of Satan, he answered that he had not said it as a fact, but had said that “he had heard it said by those returning from Rome.”⁶⁰ Hus himself may have taken care to make these nice distinctions, but his audience drew simpler conclusions. The “primitive church” became a catchphrase for the opposite of everything that was wrong with the actual church; the figure of Antichrist became an “epitome of all who were loyal to the papal and Roman establishment.”⁶¹

Hus’s colleague Jakoubek of Střibro was an outspoken advocate for utraquism (Communion in both kinds), and a proponent of restorationism (reform of the church through the restoration of the practices of primitive, apostolic Christianity). He was devoted both to the ideas of Matthew of Janov and to the teachings of John Wyclif.⁶² In his treatise *De antichristo*, which dates from 1412, Jakoubek made allusion to the papal Antichrist. For example, he wrote,

The Antichrist is a false Christ or Christian, fraudulently opposite to the truth of the life and teaching of Christ, running over with the highest degree of malice, but concealed either wholly or for the most part; possessing the highest degree in the church and arrogating to himself the highest authority over every person clerical or lay because of his fullness of power [*plena potestate*], and controlling the greatest multitudes of the

57. Hus, *De ecclesia*, 129n2, 130.

58. Kaminsky, *History of the Hussite Revolution*, 40.

59. Hus, *De ecclesia*, 128.

60. Ibid.

61. Ibid.

62. Kaminsky, *History of the Hussite Revolution*, 40, 52, 55, 78, 180–84; Spinka, *John Hus’ Concept of the Church*, 80, 90, 298; Preuss, *Vorstellungen vom Antichrist*, 54–57.

rich and wise men of the age throughout the universal church, not from his own action alone, but also from the action of Satan in agreement with his aims and will, powerful in all the riches of the world, in authority, and rank, but especially and principally abusing for his own glory and cupidity these goods which are of Christ Jesus, as are the scriptures, the sacraments and the outward and visible signs of religion, deceitfully deflecting to the flesh things that are spiritual, and subtly and covertly fitting the things that have been established and granted through Christ for salvation, to seduction from the truth and virtue of Christ Jesus.⁶³

One can gain a sense of the effect of the antipapal agitation in Prague by the fact that, during the course of 1412, King Wenceslaus IV (1378–1419) attempted to forbid anyone from calling the pope the Antichrist!⁶⁴

The fiery sermons at Bethlehem Chapel certainly contributed to popular agitation in early fifteenth-century Prague. But in addition to incendiary rhetoric, illustrations in the form of wall paintings and placards also served to convey the reformers' message of antipapalism. These illustrations were a graphic realization of the so-called Antichrist antitheses that John Wyclif had spelled out in his *De potestate pape* and elsewhere. This motif involved contrasting pairs of images, describing the humility, poverty, and charity of Christ as opposed to the pomp, luxury, and cupidity of the pope. These representations became the subject not only of paintings and placards, but of an elaborate treatise written by the radical Hussite Nicholas of Dresden, entitled *Tables of the Old Color and the New*. This treatise provided scholarly gravitas for the motif and helped popularize it not only in Bohemia but elsewhere in Europe as well.⁶⁵

The Antichrist Antitheses

Master Nicholas was active as a schoolmaster among the German community in Prague from 1412 to 1415. During this period, he emerged as one of the leading reform ideologues among the Czechs and the chief promoter of Hussite ideas among the Germans in Prague.⁶⁶ His speaking to both com-

63. Quoted in Preuss, *Vorstellungen vom Antichrist*, 56. For the archival location of Jakoubek's treatise, see *ibid.*, 275–76.

64. Kaminsky, *History of the Hussite Revolution*, 81. For a discussion of antichristology and popular culture in fifteenth-century Bohemia, see Fudge, "Night of the Antichrist," 33–45.

65. Today manuscripts of the *Tables* are extant in Basel, Cracow, Karlsruhe, Prague, Vienna, and Herrnhut. See *OC&N*, 32–34.

66. Svec, *Bildagitation*, 128–30; *OC&N*, 9.

munities is especially noteworthy, given the traditional animosity between the Germans, who enjoyed an historic position of social superiority, and the Czechs, who had begun to demand political and social equality. Precious little is known of Nicholas's biography. He was a master, presumably of arts, who had formal training in canon law, for he was referred to as "baccalareus decretorum." He was also a priest, but the location of his ordination is unknown. His writings demonstrate a thorough familiarity with the ideas of John Wyclif and Matthew of Janov, which suggests that he might have studied at the University of Prague.⁶⁷ He was associated with the scholars of the Dresden School, a group of German secondary school masters who fled from Dresden to Prague after their bishop forbade secondary schools from teaching the Bible and canon law. These masters had been expounding theology and canon law with a strong antipapal slant for about a year and a half before the bishop took action. They then went to Prague where the Czech reformers took them in and gave them a place to live.⁶⁸

A record of the Inquisition's examination of a student from the Dresden School provides insight into its teachings. In 1425, he told his inquisitorial examiners that he had been taught that Christ, not the pope, was the head of the church, that ordination gave a priest license to preach anywhere, that priests should live without wealth and should not exercise secular dominion, that the church should not have accepted the Donation of Constantine, and that it was only necessary to believe what was in the Bible.⁶⁹

Master Nicholas's *Tabulae veteris et novi coloris* (*Tables of the Old Color and the New*) is most likely his earliest work, dating from the first half of 1412.⁷⁰ The title itself requires some explanation. The word *tabulae* means "tables" in the sense of the "tables of the law," a compendium of authorities concerning the old, or primitive church, and the new, or contemporary, church. Nicholas himself referred to this work using the title *Cortina de Antichristo*. The word *cortina* has the figurative meaning of a collection of authorities, and thus is essentially identical to the meaning of the word *tabulae*. The

67. Ibid., 5–9; Müller, "Magister Nikolaus von Dresden."

68. OC&N, 7.

69. Ibid., 6.

70. Ibid., 37. Howard Kaminsky et al. list eighteen works that can be attributed to Master Nicholas and an additional nine works that are "possibly attributable" to him; *ibid.*, 28–34.

term *coloris* refers not to actual “colors” but rather to the appearance, aspect, or systems of the primitive versus the contemporary church.⁷¹

The form of the *Tables* is unusual and deserves comment. The tractate reads as a kind of guide for artists who wished to create illustrations that depicted the differences between the characteristics of the ancient, primitive church and the contemporary Roman Church. It is hard to imagine that someone trained in canon law would choose the format of a handbook for artists as a means to convey his radical ecclesiological ideas. If Nicholas, in fact, set out to write an artist’s handbook, it shows great originality and creativity, for the combination of text and pictures produced a powerful piece of propaganda. Howard Kaminsky suggests that the *Tables* began as a topical collection of authorities drawn from canon law, the church fathers, and scripture, culled to document differences between the primitive and the contemporary churches. As a student of Wyclif, Nicholas might have compiled such a list, for in his *De Christo et suo adversario Antichristo*, Wyclif called for a repertory of this kind.⁷² Kaminsky posits that pictures were added to a catalogue of authorities, and that the *Tables* then evolved into a “hard-hitting and fast-moving” polemic.⁷³

Nicholas’s intended audience included both Bohemian Germans, whom he wished to win over to sectarian reform, and Hussite intellectuals, for whom he was providing historical, patristical, juridical, and scriptural bases for the rejection of the papal church. The work appears to have been quite popular. We know, for example, that Hussite agitators carried protest posters based on the *Tables*.⁷⁴ The pictures associated with the *Tables* are no longer extant, though this pictorial tradition is captured in some of the illustrations of the Göttingen Codex and the Jena Codex.⁷⁵

71. Ibid., 35; *Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary* (1971), s.v. “colour.”

72. In the *De Christo et suo adversario Antichristo*, Wyclif wrote, “Let a person look at the writings of the apostles, which were written out of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and at the papal writings, such as bulls and epistolary decrees. That person is able to understand in what way they do not agree in meaning, for the papal writings talk about worldly excellence, while the evangelical writings introduce humble flight from the world.” See *OC&N*, 10n37.

73. Ibid., 10.

74. Ibid., 25.

75. Compiled probably as a memorial for the future, the Jena Codex contains 114 folios of mixed manuscript content together with one incunabular section, dating from the period of 1490 to 1510. Sometime after 1526, it was transported to Germany ending up in Jena, where it remained until it was returned to Prague in 1951. An unknown artist provided the codex with several illuminations of the Antichrist antitheses, derived from Nicholas of Dresden’s *Tabulae veteris et novi coloris*. See Dbroná, *Jena Codex*. The Göttingen Codex was created in a Bohemian workshop in the 1460s; in 1776 the university library of Göttingen acquired it. Its illustrations are also on the theme of the Antichrist antitheses. They are lightly sketched and

Fourteen manuscript versions of the *Tables* have survived.⁷⁶

In the *Tables*, the commonplace of the papal Antichrist moves from the realm of moral reform and academic critique into the sphere of popular propaganda. The tone of the work is caustic. Its purpose is to provide an omnium-gatherum of authorities that praise the primitive church and condemn the present-day Roman Church. Citations to scripture or canon law provide the subject matter for graphic illustrations of the differences between the two churches. Because the focus is pictorial, the contrasts are represented in stark terms. The *Tables* present the pope as a symbol of the corruption of the contemporary church. The complex idea of the mystical body of Antichrist with Satan as its head is reduced to an image of the pope as Antichrist surrounded by whores.⁷⁷

The contrast between Christ and the pope stands as a metaphor for the contrast between the system of the Roman Church (privileged hierarchy, simonists, canon law, and jurisdictional claims) and the primitive church (apostolic poverty, humility, long-suffering, and moral perfection). Nicholas presents the primitive church not just as an idealistic abstraction that can serve as a moral guide, but as an historic reality that can actually be reborn.⁷⁸ He provides the scholarly foundation for a “pictorial actualization of the Primitive Church.”⁷⁹

The tractate is divided into nine sections or tables, each having several parts addressing either the old color (primitive church) or the new color (Roman Church).⁸⁰ Preceding table 1 is the heading “The Conversation of Christ contrasted with the Conversation of the Antichrist”; the term “conversation” or “conversacio” must be understood in the sense of “manner of conducting oneself” or “behavior.”⁸¹ Each table has numbered paragraphs that give descriptions for either the old or the new “color.”

colored, looking like the work of a scribe rather than an illuminator. See Svec, *Bildagitation*, 19–25.

76. *OC&N*, 32–34.

77. See the ninth table, *ibid.*, 62.

78. *Ibid.*, 10.

79. *Ibid.*, 23.

80. Tables 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, and 9 follow the format of numbered items. Table 5 has an introduction, four numbered items, and an exposition; Table 6 includes four numbered items plus several contrasts labeled “assailant” and “solution.” Table 7 begins with two assailant/solution pairs and ends with an exposition.

81. See *Random House Dictionary of the English Language*, 2nd ed., s.v. “conversation,” and *Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary* (1971), s.v. “conversation.”

Given that *Tables* is a substantial compendium of authorities, it is difficult to summarize. The images that it cites, however, are simple contrasts between the life of Christ or apostolic Christians and the life of the pope and the curia. For example, Christ carrying the cross versus the pope riding a horse wearing the insignia of his apostolic office; Christ with a crown of thorns versus Louis the Pious confirming papal authority over Rome and its territories; Christ being whipped versus a forger of papal letters imprisoned for life; Mary with Jesus wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger versus Emperor Constantine crowning the pope and placing a purple cape on him; John the Baptist clothed in camel's hair versus the splendor of papal vestments; and Christ washing the feet of the disciples versus the pope having his feet kissed.

Master Nicholas clearly identified the pope as the Antichrist, reducing complex medieval antichristology to blunt contrasts between Christ and the saints of the early church on the one hand, and the contemporary pope and clerical hierarchy on the other. He thereby removed nuances and qualifications, leaving a simplified content that well served the purposes of antipapal propaganda. Just in case these unvarnished contrasts did not sufficiently make the point, Master Nicholas added an editorial comment at the beginning of the ninth table: "(After this there is a picture of the Antichrist, with whores. What is said of the Antichrist applies to the Pope.)"⁸²

The Czech reformers developed the notion of the Antichrist as a composite phenomenon, which they applied to the papacy and the hierocratic church. They elaborated the theme of the Antichrist antitheses, found in the writings of John Wyclif, making it into a propaganda tool. Last but not least, they introduced an anatomical metaphor as a means of describing the papal Antichrist. An anonymous Hussite author elaborated this trope in *The Anatomy of the Antichrist*, a work that has a bearing on Philip Melanchthon's anatomical explanation of the Roman monster, as will be discussed in chapter 4.

The Anatomy of the Antichrist

The Anatomy of the Antichrist (*De antichristo & memborum eius anatomia*)⁸³ owes its reception and influence in part to its misattribution to John Hus. It

82. OC&N, 62.

83. A facsimile of the 1524 printing of *De anatomia Antichristi* can be found in *Matthias Janov Opera*, i [r]–xlvi [v]. The first printing in Germany was *De anatomia Antichristi*, edited by Otto Brunfels (Strassburg: J. Schott, 1524); in 1558 Matthäus Flacius edited a two-volume collection of Hus's works entitled *His-*

has a fascinating publication history. Prior to his death, Ulrich von Hutten received copies of treatises dealing with the Antichrist and with the execution of Hus from unidentified Bohemian Hussites;⁸⁴ presumably the *Anatomy* was included among these items. Hutten died in August 1523, after taking part in the chaos of the Knights' Revolt and then fleeing to Zurich. Thereafter, his friend Otto Brunfels, a former Carthusian monk, student at Wittenberg, pastor, and schoolmaster⁸⁵ acquired various Hussite manuscripts from Hutten's estate. Believing that the *Anatomy* was written by Hus himself, Brunfels published it together with several other works in 1524. In his introduction, he relates the following information:

A more useful book, appropriate to these times, has not been written in the last eight hundred years. But how it came into our hands, because it is a long story, let the following explanation be sufficient. . . . [I]t was returned to me from the books of Hutten that had been seized. . . . It is neither expedient nor safe [to say] more about these matters, but if only it had been handed over in good condition! . . . For many things were incoherent, many were worn away by excessive age, some things so written by the scribe that we did not know what they meant. For this reason we were forced, when places were too obscure, to mark asterisks * in the margin, and two asterisks ** where something was lacking or missing; for we were reluctant either to erase something rashly or to insert something of which we were not very certain. We also had great difficulty with the Bohemian notes in the margin; and, since we did not understand them, we were forced to omit many of them. Nevertheless, we have included some. Besides, we have introduced all the clarity that you see in the division of chapters and books. For, formerly it flowed in an uninterrupted discussion, so that you might call it a "story without a beginning." Therefore, if anything can be useful to you, give credit first to Christ, by whose providence it has happened that this author has come to life again in these most recent times, then, to the most distinguished

toria Ioannis Hussi et Hieronymi Pragensis (Nuremberg: Ioannis Montani et Vlrici Neuberi, 1558), which also contains *De anatomia Antichristi*. On the occasion of the two-hundredth anniversary of the Reformation, Hus's works were again printed in 1715. A digitized version of the *De anatomia Antichristi* is available through Munchner DigitalisierungsZentrum Digitale Bibliothek at [urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb00026197-0](http://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb00026197-0). Unless otherwise noted, all notes to the text of *De anatomia Antichristi* refer to the 1715 edition. See *De Antichristo & membrorum ejus anatomia*, 423–64. For a recent discussion of the *Anatomia Antichristi* see Buck, "Anatomia Antichristi," 349–68.

84. OC&N, 32.

85. ADB, s.v. "Brunfels."

knight and [man] of everlasting memory, Ulrich von Hutten, from whose estate it is.⁸⁶

In publishing his collection of Hussite works, Brunfels included a dedication to Martin Luther along with Luther's response (dated October 17, 1524).⁸⁷ Luther (and presumably also Melanchthon) thus knew of this work for some time before its publication, for he had had time to read it and write a response to the dedication. Already at the time of the Leipzig Disputation (July 1519), Luther had become quite interested in the teachings of Hus. The fact that the *Anatomy* was believed to have come from Hus's hand lent it significance and credibility among the Wittenberg reformers.

It continued to be attributed to Hus when it was reprinted in 1558 and again in 1715. In the nineteenth century, E. H. Gillett (1863) asserted that it was the work of Matthew of Janov.⁸⁸ In the early twentieth century, Herbert Workman (1902) argued that John Milíč was the author.⁸⁹ At about the same time, Hans Preuss (1906) continued to believe that Hus should be credited with the work.⁹⁰ In 1911 Vlastimil Kybal, the editor of Matthew of Janov's *Regulae*, rejected both Milíč and Janov as possible authors.⁹¹ In 1975 Werner-Friedrich-Aloys Jakobsmeier, in an introduction to a facsimile of the 1524 edition, rejected all previous attributions, suggesting that the *Anatomy* was the work of an author associated with the Taborites.⁹² Jakobsmeier may be correct, but the fact remains that the treatise commanded the attention of Luther and his followers because they believed it to be the work of John Hus.

The *Anatomy* comprises a compilation of ideas drawn from the works of Matthew of Janov, John Wyclif, John Hus, and Nicholas of Dresden and may date from the first third of the fifteenth century.⁹³ It is every bit as much

86. *De anatomia Antichristi*, ed. Brunfels, ii[v]–iii[r].

87. Brunfels's dedication to Luther appeared on ii[r]–vi[r] of vol. 1; Luther's response was printed on the verso of the title page for the second volume of Brunfels's collection. See *De anatomia Antichristi*, in *Matthias Janov Opera*, 2:i[v]; and *De Antichristo & memborum ejus anatomia*, 420–23. See also "Luther an Otto Brunfels in Strassburg" in *WABr*, 3:359.

88. Gillett, *Life and Times of John Huss*, 33–34.

89. Workman, *Dawn of the Reformation*, 105, 355–56.

90. Preuss, *Vorstellungen vom Antichrist*, 52–54.

91. Matthew of Janov, *Regulae*, 3:xxi.

92. *Matthias Janov Opera*, ed. Beyreuther, Meyer, and Molnár, 23. As recently as 1990, Christopher Hill attributed the *Anatomia Antichristi* to Hus. See Hill, *Antichrist in Seventeenth Century England*, 60.

93. Jakobsmeier notes that the *Anatomy's* antichristology conforms to the *Confessio taboritarum* of 1431, *Matthias Janov Opera*, 1:23.

of a *cortina* (or collection of authorities) as the *Tables of the Old Color and the New*—a comprehensive presentation of the collective *Antichristus mysticus*, thoroughly documented, and contrasted with an ideal, true Christendom. In the *Anatomy*, one finds the same kind of omnium-gatherum of scriptural references and illustrative images as are in Nicholas's treatise. The format, however, is quite different. To explicate the papal Antichrist, the *Tables* uses a collection of contrasting images, while the *Anatomy* presents a compendium of commonplaces. Even so, the anatomical explanations are quite graphic. It begins with an introductory section listing the "names" of the Antichrist. Next it presents thirty-nine chapters detailing the metaphorical meanings of the monstrous animalized body of the Antichrist. In a final section, the treatise presents yet another take on the Antichrist antitheses. The *Anatomy* thus surveys antichristology using nominal tropes, anatomical metaphors, and antithetical contrasts.⁹⁴

The introductory listing of the names of the Antichrist provides an inventory of commonplaces together with supporting scriptural passages. The list includes sixty-two references in alphabetical order from "Abomination of Desolation" to "Virgin Daughter of Babylon."⁹⁵

In the next part of the treatise, the author presents an anatomical analysis, body part by body part, of the corpus of the creature, thereby providing "a description of the Antichrist according to the limbs of his mystic body, and the meanings of those limbs in the Holy Scripture."⁹⁶ Beginning with the head, and continuing down the body, the author discusses, in turn, the crown of the head, the hair, face, eyes, ears, nose, mouth, tongue, spittle, teeth, lips, chin, beard, neck, arms, hands, breasts, heart, lungs, spleen, stomach, viscera, belly, loins, legs, knees, feet, shins, blood vessels, skin, and tail. Each body part receives a thorough explication through both scriptural references and metaphorical meanings. Sometimes the scriptural texts offer a specific meaning; in other cases, the Bible passages are rather vague, leaving the author wide latitude for interpretation. The explanations are somewhat discursive but typically lead to the conclusion that the body part in question stands for some abstract quality of evil or wickedness. A few representative examples can illustrate the author's approach.

94. For a discussion of the close parallels between *The Anatomy of the Antichrist* and Melancthon's *The Pope-Ass Explained*, see Buck, "Anatomia Antichristi," 349–68.

95. For the full list, see *ibid.*, 367–68; and *De Antichristo & membrorum ejus anatomia*, 425–26.

96. *Ibid.*, 426.

In discussing the head, the *Anatomy* uses the language of the medieval hierocratic publicists, but it turns their theory upside down by calling the pope the Antichrist. One of the best known of the thirteenth-century hierocrats was Augustinus Triumphus (1243–1328). In defending the absolutist papal monarchy, he argued that “the pope is the very head of the whole mystical body of the church in such a way that he receives nothing of power and authority from the members, but only exercises influence on them, for he is purely and simply the head.”⁹⁷ The *Anatomy* assumes that the pope is the *caput ecclesiae*, but it also assumes that he is the Antichrist. The head represents leadership or dominion and is the “most central and most powerful part of the host of the Antichrist.”⁹⁸ The pope rules the lower limbs (the church) and entirely dominates them. His corrupting influence spreads through the body by means of his vitiated common sense, imagination, judgment, and memory. The head claims both spiritual and secular jurisdiction, as if from the heights of heaven, while it really dwells in the lowest places of the earth.⁹⁹

The hands of the Evil One symbolize deception and hypocrisy. The right hand is associated with things spiritual, the left with matters secular. Antichrist pretends to use his right hand for blessing while he really devotes himself to acquiring the power of heaven. The left hand is associated with violence because he uses it to repress the earth and humble kings. Antichrist deceitfully uses the left hand to lead the hearts of the simple people to himself.¹⁰⁰

In the section on the breasts, the Antichrist becomes a woman. She is a whore who uses her breasts to suckle her little ones—perverse doctrine and a perverse life. She nourishes her people on perverse doctrine so that they will not come to know the law of Christ, because it is said that all justice of the law is enclosed in the chamber of her heart. At this point, the author is referring to the *Scrinium pectoris* decretal of Boniface VIII (1294–1303), which stated that the Roman pontiff had all laws in the chamber of his heart (*scrinium pectoris*) and could therefore modify canon law as he saw fit.¹⁰¹ Perverse doctrine blinds the followers of the Evil One; a perverse life strengthens them against the example of Christ and the apostles, and thus binds them closely to him.¹⁰²

97. Schatz, *Papal Primacy*, 94. See also Wilks, *Problem of Sovereignty in the Later Middle Ages*, 15–64.

98. *De Antichristo & memborum ejus anatomia*, 427.

99. *Ibid.*, 426–28.

100. *Ibid.*, 443–44.

101. *LW*, 44:202n215; *PE*, 2:148n2.

102. *De Antichristo & memborum ejus anatomia*, 444–45.

The belly is the location for both the stomach and the womb. The former symbolizes greed, for Antichrist devours the property of the living and the dead, the rich and the poor, widows and orphans, and nobles and commoners. His greed wants to consume the entire world, so he makes false things legitimate, acquits murderers for the sake of an advantage, and inflates idiots against learned men. He practices simony and seeks the riches of injustice. In this section, the Antichrist is again construed as both male and female; she has a womb in which her greed conceives sorrow and brings forth iniquity, according to Psalms 7:15. At the instigation of the devil, she conceives sorrow, which is the desire for temporal things, acquires the goods of the world, and spawns injustice.¹⁰³

The feet of the Antichrist are the preachers of his sect. According to Revelation 13:[2], the feet are the feet of a bear. The reference to a bear makes possible an extended explanatory analogy. A bear is a filthy animal that loves honey and sweets. The Antichrist is also filthy because of his evil thoughts, his murders, adulteries, sexual sins, thefts, false testimony, and blasphemies. Honey and sweets stand for worldly things and a life of pleasure. Like a bear, the preachers are strong, not in their body but in their power to mislead the people.¹⁰⁴

The skin of the Antichrist signifies the treachery with which he protects himself and his followers. The *Anatomy* cites Job 41:6–7: “His body is like molten shields, shut close up with scales pressing upon one another. One is joined to another, and not so much as any air can come between them.”¹⁰⁵ Consistent with this passage, the author describes the Antichrist as covered with pressed scales, obstinate in his teaching, defending himself with innumerable errors, allowing no breath of truth to enter any of his limbs. His scales are joined to one another; they stick together and cannot be pulled apart.¹⁰⁶

The tail symbolizes teachers of falsehood, consistent with Isaiah 9:15: “and the prophet that teacheth lies, he is the tail.” Just as the tail covers the foulness of an animal, so the Antichrist’s tail covers, excuses, and justifies his malice. Also, the tail thrashes the air and stirs up flies in the same way that false prophets stir up the “flies” of twisted thoughts. The *Anatomy* cites Revelation 12:4: “And

103. Ibid., 452–53.

104. Ibid., 455–56.

105. In describing the skin of Antichrist as “like molten shields, shut close up with scales” (Job 41:6), the *Anatomy* follows Matthew of Janov; see Kybal, *Regulae*, 3:69.

106. *De Antichristo & membrorum ejus anatomia*, 456.

his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and cast them to the earth.” Just as the dragon’s tail draws down stars from heaven so false prophets seduce humans, who seem to shine before others in the sanctity of their lives, as if stars, and throw them down into earthly delights.¹⁰⁷

The third section of the *Anatomy* (chapter 43) contains a version of the Antichrist antitheses that repeats much of the content from Wyclif’s original contrasts, but which goes beyond Wyclif to add items that reflect the topos of the *Antichristus mysticus*, central to the antichristology of Matthew of Janov. Eight of Wyclif’s twelve contrasts are quite similar to ones listed in the *Anatomy*. Interestingly, Wyclif’s criticisms of papal claims to secular jurisdiction are not included. Unlike Wyclif’s simple antitheses and unlike the very graphic contrasts of Nicholas of Dresden’s *Tables of the Old Color and the New*, the *Anatomy* includes antitheses that have more abstract, theological content, and that specifically reference the concept of the collective Antichrist. Towards the end of this chapter, the author contrasts the *corpus Christi mysticum* (i.e., the church of true believers) with the composite limbs of the Antichrist. Christ gathers his church in unity while Antichrist scatters the church through dispensations and turns believers against each other. The lives of the *membra Christi* are pure while those of the *membra Antichristi* are hypocritical and filled with vice.¹⁰⁸

The author of the *Anatomy* leaves no doubt that he is writing in the tradition of the papal Antichrist. In chapter 42, he explicitly states that there are three chief Satanic lies and blasphemies issuing from the tail of the Antichrist: that the pope is the vicar of Christ on earth and the head of the church militant, that papal decrees must be accepted as if they are the gospel, and that the laws of the pope supersede the gospel. Indeed, when the pope presumes to interpret scripture or to supplement a deficiency therein, he blasphemes like a noonday devil (*daemonium meridianum*). In sum, the pope in Rome is the chief vicar of Satan and the principal Antichrist.¹⁰⁹

Recapitulation

By the 1520s, when Otto Brunfels published his edition of the *Anatomy of the Antichrist* and Philip Melanchthon wrote his pope-ass pamphlet, the figure of the Antichrist had developed into a multifarious concept with layer upon

107. Ibid., 456–57.

108. Ibid., 458–61.

109. Ibid., 457–58.

layer of meaning and multiple modes of metaphorical expression. At the core of the concept was Abbot Adso's narrative of the deceiving Son of Perdition who would foreshadow the Last Days. To this Joachim of Fiore and those whom he influenced added the notion that the book of Revelation and the figure of Antichrist could be used to interpret contemporary events and to place them in the context of the imminent end of time. The Joachimites held that the Antichrist would be an historical personage, an evil prophet or false pope, metaphorically the "seventh head of the dragon" (Rev. 12). While Joachim did not identify a particular pope as Antichrist, the Fraticelli were much less circumspect. They were certain that the abomination of desolation, mentioned in the books of Daniel and Matthew, was their nemesis, Pope John XXII. The notion of a papal Antichrist gained strength and currency during the time of the Great Schism. John Wyclif became convinced that both Urban VI and Clement VII were Antichrists, and he urged faithful Christians to withhold their allegiance from both papal claimants. At the end of his life, he went even further, referring to the whole institution of the papacy as the Antichrist.

The idea that the Antichrist was not a single figure but rather an institution or a collective was a proposition that the late medieval Bohemian reformers developed into an elaborate system. Matthew of Janov assembled extensive scriptural references to argue that the Antichrist was a composite body of carnal, concupiscent, avaricious, hypocritical pseudo-Christians within the visible church. To describe this collective he used the term "Antichristus mysticus," first coined by the Spiritual Franciscans. For Matthew of Janov, the members of the mystical Antichrist were *figurae* or figures of the *Antichristus literalis et proprius* (literal and proper Antichrist). He contended that the institution of the papacy had become corrupted by its wealth and its efforts to dominate the world. To quote Howard Kaminsky, Matthew was not "antipapal" but rather "antipapalist,"¹¹⁰ that is, he was opposed to the "permeation of the church by the world," manifested in the contemporary papacy.

Drawing on the writings of native Bohemian reformers, the ideas of John Wyclif, and the work of John Hus and Jakoubek of Střibro, the Hussite writers of the early fifteenth century brought the concept of the papal Antichrist to its full, florid, late medieval elaboration. For Nicholas of Dresden, the Antichrist was the papacy, as could be proved by the stark contrasts between the norm of the primitive church and the behavior of the contemporary Roman Church.

110. Kaminsky, *History of the Hussite Revolution*, 10.

Finally, the author of *The Anatomy of the Antichrist* provided a comprehensive summary of antichristology using scriptural names, anatomical metaphors, and antithetical contrasts.

By the beginning of the sixteenth century, the term “Antichrist” connoted deception, carnality, antipapalism, apocalypticism, and an eschatological reading of historical and contemporary events. In the world of late medieval antichristology, the report of a monstrosity could be readily interpreted as a portent of the papal Antichrist, precisely what Philip Melancthon did in *The Pope-Ass Explained*. In writing this tract, he faced the compositional challenge of integrating key Lutheran teachings with the *topoi* of anti-papal antichristology and the preexisting image of the Roman monster. His pamphlet reveals a thorough knowledge of the same anatomical commonplaces as are contained in *The Anatomy of the Antichrist*, as will be seen in chapter 4.

Chapter 4

Philip Melanchthon's *The Pope-Ass Explained* (1523)



IN 1523, THE LUTHERAN REFORMATION appropriated the Roman monster transforming it into the so-called pope-ass. That transition took place by way of Philip Melanchthon's popular propaganda pamphlet *The Pope-Ass Explained*, where he interpreted the physiognomy of the monster, explaining each body part as an aspect of the papal regime. The pamphlet itself is quite short, but it proved to be both popular and influential because it construed a monstrous portent both as an emblematic figuration (*figura*) of the papal Antichrist and as a digest of early Reformation polemics. In other words, the metaphorical explanations amounted to an epitome of the ideas of the early Lutheran movement. To substantiate that the tract drew its content from its context, this investigation will place each of the physiognomic metaphors into its historical setting.

The idea that Melanchthon's pamphlet was a success because it reflected both late medieval antichristology and Reformation polemics differs from the usual interpretation of this work. Most historians have simply described the content of the tract, without commenting on its context; others have been much harsher. Konrad von Lange, for example, characterized *The Pope-Ass Explained* as "the most unsatisfactory of Melanchthon's writings," asserting that it forced an explanation onto a pre-existing image in an unskillful manner.¹ In this same vein, James Mackinnon commented that the pope-ass tract "did not reflect credit" on its author.² These negative assessments fail to explain the pamphlet's popularity, its numerous reprintings and translations, and its influence on Reformation polemical writing. If, however, one looks at the tract as an epitome of the early Reformation movement, as a digest of its agenda, related through the explanation of a portent, then one can begin to appreciate why it was such a powerful piece of early Protestant propaganda.

1. Lange, *Papstesel*, 85–86.

2. Mackinnon, *Luther and the Reformation*, 3:154.

Its message referenced most of the topics at issue in the controversial literature up to 1523, buttressed with the authority of a divine revelation.

In order to follow the argument in this chapter, the reader will need to consult the text of the pamphlet, paragraph by paragraph. To facilitate this, an English translation is provided as an appendix. Page and line references in the translation follow the page and line indications in volume 11 of the Weimar edition (WA) of Luther's works: thus [378/32] means page 378, line 32 of WA volume 11.

The earliest mention of the publication project that resulted in *The Pope-Ass Explained* comes from a letter that Martin Luther wrote to his friend and fellow Augustinian Wenceslaus Linck on January 16, 1523. Here he stated that he planned to write an interpretation of a deformed monstrosity, explaining it as a portent specifically against monasticism.³ This project became part of a joint publication that he and Philip Melanchthon issued later that year entitled *Explanation of Two Horrible Figures, the Pope-Ass at Rome and the Monkcalf Found at Freiberg in Meissen* (*Deuttung der czwo grewlichen Figuren, Bapstesels czu Rom und Munchkalbs zu Freyberg ynn Meysszen funden*).⁴ For his part, Melanchthon undertook to explain the Roman monster as a figure of the papal Antichrist. He firmly believed that the interpretation of signs (monstrosities, astrological phenomena, etc.) could reveal the future. In *The Pope-Ass Explained*, he conflated an interpretation of a portent with commonplaces of the papal Antichrist and key ideas of the Lutheran Reformation, creating a simple and graphic explication.

By 1523, Melanchthon had emerged as Luther's partner in leadership of the reform movement. He had come to Wittenberg in 1518, at the age of twenty-one, to assume the position of professor of Greek at the university. An outstanding linguist and the nephew of the famous humanist Johannes Reuchlin, he held a master of arts from Tübingen and earned a bachelor of theology one year after arriving at his new job. Given that the joint publication project was to focus on the papacy and monasticism, it made sense for Luther to address the latter topic, for he had personal experience as an Augustinian monk. For his part, prior to 1523, Melanchthon had published several works that discussed the nature of the church and that questioned claims of

3. St.L., 21a:474.

4. WA, 11:357–85; St.L., 19:1934–47. Melanchthon's pamphlet had the separate title *Der Bapstesel durch Philippen Melanchthon deuttet*, or *The Pope-Ass Explained by Philip Melanchthon*. Luther's pamphlet was separately titled *Deuttung des Munchkalbs zu Freyberg* (*The Meaning of the Monk-Calf at Freyberg*).

papal primacy. He was therefore well qualified to undertake an explication of the Roman monster in an antipapal screed.

The pope-ass pamphlet was one of many polemical exchanges between the Lutheran camp and the defenders of traditional Catholicism. Initially, these altercations focused on Luther's opposition to the sale of indulgences, but they quickly came to include issues having to do with the nature of the church, the power and position of the papacy, and the implications of the doctrine of justification by faith. The Leipzig Disputation of 1519 and the pamphlet warfare that ensued in its wake highlighted these issues and helped form the context for Melanchthon's pamphlet.

It was at the Leipzig Disputation that Luther first publicly debated his opposition to papal primacy. In the pamphlets he and Melanchthon wrote after the debate, they further elaborated on this point, clarifying their ideas on the nature of the church. Also, in the audience at the debate was a Czech Utraquist named Jacob who had come to Leipzig to witness the disputation. Through him Luther first came into contact with Bohemian Utraquist clergy, who sent him a copy of Hus's *De ecclesia*. These contacts later expanded to include the Czech printer Ulrichus Velenus, who sent Luther his own work disputing the belief that St. Peter was the first bishop of Rome. Velenus was also the probable source of Luther's copy of the Roman monster reproduced by Wenzel von Olmütz. This image, in turn, was the pictorial inspiration for Melanchthon's pope-ass pamphlet and the accompanying woodcut by Lucas Cranach.

The Leipzig Disputation was also important in Melanchthon's career as a reformer, for it transformed him from an "idle spectator" (as he called himself) into an active leader at the forefront of the Reformation movement.⁵ Shortly after the debate, he published a detailed account, written as a letter to his friend Johannes Oecolampadius of Tübingen.⁶ In response to this letter, Johann Eck, Luther's antagonist at Leipzig, published a harsh attack against Melanchthon, referring to him as "the Wittenberg grammarian who knows some Greek and Latin."⁷ To this, Melanchthon responded with his *Defense against Johann Eck*.⁸ The notoriety of the papal primacy issue led to yet another attack, this time from an Italian, Thomas Rhadinus Todiscus of Placentia. His *Oration of Thomas Rhadinus against the Heretic Martin Luther*

5. Manschreck, *Melanchthon*, 44.

6. MSW, 21–28.

7. Manschreck, *Melanchthon*, 49.

8. MWA, 1:12–22.

prompted Melanchthon to respond with a pseudonymous work, the *Oration of Didymus Faventius against Thomas Placentia, on Behalf of Martin Luther, Theologian*,⁹ in which he laid out, in detail, the bases for rejecting the claim of papal primacy. In this *Oration* we can find some of the key ideas presented later in a simplified way in the pope-ass pamphlet.

Other of Melanchthon's early works also shed light on aspects of the pope-ass tract. For example, in 1521 he published one of his best-known works, his *Loci communes*.¹⁰ While primarily focused on theological topics like sin, law, and grace, the *Loci communes* nevertheless touched on several of the criticisms that appear again in the pope-ass work. In October 1521, Melanchthon wrote *Against the Furious Decree of the Parisian Theologasters, an Apology by Philip Melanchthon for Luther*,¹¹ which was his response to the pronouncement from the Sorbonne faculty of religion that more than one hundred of Luther's ideas were in error.¹² To understand why Melanchthon and Luther developed such antipathy towards the papacy, one must appreciate the crescendo of vitriol that spilled forth from the Wittenberg reformers and the defenders of traditional Catholicism from 1517 to 1523. To that end a brief review of events up to 1523 is necessary.

Reformation Narrative to 1523

The first major clash between Luther and the Roman Church centered on the sale of indulgences near Wittenberg. To attack the indulgence traffic, Luther drafted his Ninety-Five Theses. In short order, Luther found himself under attack by the Dominican indulgence seller Johann Tetzel, by Archbishop Albert of Mainz, and by Johann Eck, a professor of theology at Ingolstadt. Pope Leo X first tried to silence Luther through the Augustinian order, but that attempt at the Heidelberg Disputation was unsuccessful. Next he tried to call Luther to Rome, to try him for heresy, but Luther's politically important prince, Elector Frederick the Wise, intervened to guarantee that he would be given a hearing in Germany. Rather than a hearing, however, Luther got an interview with the general of the Dominican order and papal legate Cardinal Cajetan, who tried unsuccessfully to persuade him to recant his ideas.

9. Ibid., 56–140.

10. Melanchthon, *Loci communes*.

11. MSW, 69–87; CR 1:399–416; MWA, 1:141–62.

12. The Sorbonne faculty never did render a judgment on the Leipzig Disputation. After Luther had been excommunicated, the Sorbonne took a stand against him.

Meanwhile, Luther was drawn into a controversy between his university colleague Andreas Karlstadt and Johann Eck. The adversaries decided on a formal disputation in which Luther and Eck would debate papal primacy. As will be noted below, this debate resulted in a flurry of publications. The Leipzig Disputation brought Luther's ideas on the nature of the church and papal primacy into clear focus. His study of church history and canon law, in preparation for the debate, led him to a new level of hostility towards the papacy.

In the spring of 1520, Leo X appointed Eck to a panel to assess Luther's ideas. This body, in turn, drafted a papal bull that Leo issued as *Exsurge domine*, condemning many of Luther's doctrines, giving him sixty days to recant his heresies, and threatening him with excommunication should he not do so. The bull was executed in Rome June 15, 1520, but Luther did not receive it in Wittenberg until October 10, 1520.

Luther had a very busy year throughout 1520. In February he read Hus's *De ecclesia* and found that he agreed with many of the ideas of this condemned heretic. As he told Spalatin, "we are all Hussites."¹³ At this time he also read Lorenzo Valla's *On the False Donation of Constantine*, a work that greatly influenced his attitude toward the papacy. In June he penned his *Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*; in August he published *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*; and in November he wrote *The Freedom of a Christian*. These works provided the most comprehensive statement of his ideas to that point. On December 10, Luther burned Leo X's *Exsurge domine*, sixty days after he had received it in Wittenberg. Shortly thereafter he published a defiant defense entitled *Why the Books of the Pope and His Disciples Were Burned by Doctor Martin Luther*.¹⁴ In January 1521, Leo X issued the bull of excommunication, *Decet romanum pontificem*, though it was not formally published in Germany until October of that year. Luther's detractors also managed to get three important universities to condemn his ideas. The Universities of Louvain and Cologne issued a joint condemnation in February 1520; in April 1521 the Sorbonne also took a stand against him.

Efforts to sanction and silence Luther continued throughout 1521 and 1522. In March 1521 Leo issued the traditional Maundy Thursday bull, *In coena domini*, a customary promulgation condemning perpetrators of various offenses ranging from heresy to piracy. This year Leo included Luther and his

13. WABr, 2:42/22–29; LW, 48:153. Georg Spalatin was chaplain and secretary to Luther's prince, Elector Frederick the Wise.

14. WA, 7:161–82; LW, 31:383–95.

followers along with other heretics such as Wyclif and Hus.¹⁵ In April, Luther traveled to Worms to be questioned before the imperial diet and the newly elected emperor, Charles V. Shortly after the examination, Charles issued the Edict of Worms, condemning Luther as a heretic and an outlaw. For his own safety, Luther then went into hiding at the Wartburg Castle, where he remained until March 1522.

While Luther was at the Wartburg, Leo X died (December 1, 1521). His successor, Adrian VI, though a dedicated reformer, continued strong opposition against Luther and his supporters. In November 1522, Adrian sent a brief to the estates of the empire assembled for a diet in Nuremberg, warning that the Lutheran championing of evangelical truth was merely a subterfuge for the theft of property.¹⁶ His nuncio to the diet, Francesco Chiericati, demanded the enforcement of the Edict of Worms and insisted that the estates join in rooting out the Lutheran heresy. He also called for the Lutheran preachers in Nuremberg to be arrested and tried for heresy. Chiericati demanded that the Nuremberg city council prohibit the publication of Lutheran materials and allow only anti-Lutheran books to be published in Nuremberg.¹⁷ Further, he sent a papal brief to the city council of Bamberg that castigated Luther and his followers, accused them of preaching poison disguised with sweet heavenly words, and called on the city council to ban the printing and sale of Lutheran works.¹⁸ A copy of the brief reached Luther early in 1523. Pope Adrian also sent letters to Erasmus, Johann Eck, Archduke Ferdinand, Duke Henry of Mecklenburg, the University of Cologne, and the cities of Mainz, Strasbourg, Speyer, and Constance urging opposition to Luther.¹⁹

As this brief narrative demonstrates, between 1517 and 1523 the papacy attempted to silence and discredit Luther through academic disputations, monastic censure, excommunication, university condemnation, imperial ban, book censorship, and governmental intimidation. Luther and Melancthon responded with letters, pamphlets, treatises, theses, and sermons framed to articulate and defend their ideas. Some of these were quite scholarly, addressed to academics and theologians. Others were simple and direct,

15. WA, 8:691–703; LW, 36:86n152; PE, 2:105–6.

16. Bornkamm, *Luther in Mid-Career*, 307.

17. WABr, 3:11–12; St.L., 19:178; Grimm, *Lazarus Spengler*, 61–62.

18. WA, 11:351/6–10, 352/13–353/5; St.L., 15:2227; Bornkamm, *Luther in Mid-Career*, 301; Bagchi, *Luther's Earliest Opponents*, 225.

19. Bagchi, *Luther's Earliest Opponents*, 223, 226n43; Hendrix, *Luther and the Papacy*, 142.

written in German and intended for a broad, popular audience. The pope-ass pamphlet belongs to this latter category. It appeared in 1523 after Leo X had died and after it had become clear that Pope Adrian VI was as opposed to the Wittenbergers as his predecessor. In explicating the physiognomy of the monster, Melanchthon incorporated many of the key ideas and reform proposals he and Luther were championing. Thus *The Pope-Ass Explained* became an epitome of the polemics of the early Reformation. One of the pivotal events of these early years was the Leipzig Disputation.

The Leipzig Disputation of 1519

Medieval universities regularly used disputations to train students, resolve academic points, and instruct audiences. Typically a set of theses would be drafted to frame the debate. These were supposed to be crafted “so that the logical conclusion of one would be related to the conclusion of another and that the entire series would clarify the main thesis.”²⁰ Thus, in preparation for their meeting at Leipzig, Karlstadt, Luther, and Eck prepared theses and counter-theses.

The publications and ceremonies preliminary to the disputation generated considerable popular interest in the event. The modern reader may find the topics for debate abstruse and lacking in popular appeal, but it would be wrong to envision the meeting as a dull academic exercise. The disputation began as a rift between Johann Eck and Andreas Karlstadt, one of Luther's fellow professors at the university. Karlstadt had prepared a large number of theses and had proposed public debates at Wittenberg in response to Eck's attacks on Luther. Despite his efforts to the contrary, Luther was quickly drawn into the dispute and the three men ultimately agreed upon a formal debate. It was decided that Karlstadt and Eck would treat free will, meritorious works, and purgatory, while Luther and Eck would debate papal primacy and the jurisdiction of the Roman Church. It fell to Eck to defend the traditional Catholic position on all of these points. The heart of the matter came to be known as Luther's Thesis Thirteen:

The very feeble decrees of the Roman pontiffs which have appeared in the last four hundred years prove that the Roman church is superior to all others. Against them stand the history of eleven hundred years, the

20. *LW*, 31:xx.

text of divine Scripture, and the decree of the council of Nicaea, the most sacred of all councils.²¹

Shortly before the debate, Luther published his *Explanation of the Thirteenth Thesis on the Authority of the Pope*,²² his first treatise on the subject of the papacy, a work that afforded the upcoming debate wide notoriety.

The debate itself has been compared to a medieval tournament.²³ It began with a celebratory mass, formal greetings, and a sententious address on “The Art of Disputation, Especially on Matters Theological.” Each day armed guards, accompanied by drums and trumpets, marched through the city to maintain order. At times they were also posted in taverns to guard against student disturbances. The event attracted a large audience, including dignitaries such as Duke George of Saxony and Barnim, heir to the dukedom of Pomerania. The Wittenberg contingent consisted of some two hundred students and faculty. At Barnim’s request, Luther preached a sermon on the festival of Saints Peter and Paul, which occurred just two days into the debate (June 29). The Gospel reading for that day was Matthew 16:13–19, the very text that was central to Rome’s claims of primacy. This text gave Luther an opportunity to lay out many of his ideas in advance of his role in the actual debate. Following the debate, Luther published his sermon.²⁴

Eck’s ability at repartee bested Karlstadt, who was not permitted to read from notes nor consult books during the debate. Luther also felt outmaneuvered by Eck and disrespected by the Leipzig audience. As he wrote his friend Spalatin, “I who try to bridle my impetuosity, am not able to banish all dislike of them [his detractors at Leipzig], because I am flesh and their impudent hatred and malignant injustice were overbearing in so sacred and divine a cause.”²⁵ Scribes recorded the debaters’ speeches so that the faculty of the Sorbonne and of the University of Erfurt could review the proceedings and declare a winner (though the review never actually took place).²⁶

The transcript is by no means the only record of the Wittenbergers’ position on papal primacy. The disputation engendered a whole series of letters and treatises in which Luther and Melanchthon defended their antipapal

21. Ibid., 318.

22. WA, 2:183–240; St.L., 18:720–819.

23. Brendler, *Martin Luther*, 153.

24. WA, 2:244–49; LW, 51:54–60; St.L., 11:2306–13.

25. WABr, 1:424; translation from Smith, *Life and Letters of Martin Luther*, 68.

26. Seitz, *Der authentische Text der Leipziger Disputation*, 1519. See also Dau, *Leipzig Debate in 1519*, 120–94.

ideas. Some were written to report the events at the debate, some to respond to attacks and criticisms, and still others to lay out the ecclesiological ideas of the Reformation. Leaving aside the transcript, the pre-debate theses, and Luther's sermon of June 29, Luther and Melanchthon brought out at least fifteen post-debate publications from July 1519 to July 1522, dealing with the ecclesiological and antipapal issues broached at Leipzig.²⁷ Melanchthon's *The Pope-Ass Explained* thus stands in a line of polemical publications. Though Melanchthon's arguments are simplified and intended for a popular audience, they nevertheless reflect the ideas he and Luther had been presenting since the Leipzig Disputation, challenging the position of the pope as the head of the church, characterizing the papacy as the Antichrist, and calling for a variety of reforms.

Luther and the Papal Antichrist

Chapter 3 demonstrated that the late medieval notion of the papal Antichrist had multiple layers of meaning. It applied a complex set of ideas to the Roman papacy, including the conflation of the historical Antichrist with the mystical or collective Antichrist, the assumption that multiple Antichrists would appear as forerunners of the Antichrist proper, an apocalyptic view of history in which the depraved Renaissance papacy was seen as a sign of the end of times, and an idealized primitive Christianity contrasted with the contemporary papal church. These connotations help define the meaning of the term "papal Antichrist" as Luther and Melanchthon used it.

Luther's growing conviction that the papacy was the true Antichrist is evident in his letters and polemical writings from 1519 to 1520. The course

27. The post-debate pamphlets and treatises by Luther and Melanchthon include Luther, *Thirteen Theses against Eck* (mid-May 1519); Luther, *Explanation of the Thirteenth Thesis on the Authority of the Pope* (written before June 27, 1519, expanded and republished after August 1519); Melanchthon, *Letter on the Leipzig Debate* (July 21, 1519); Melanchthon, *Eighteen Theses for Academic Discussion*, see esp. thesis 16 (July 1520); Melanchthon, *Defense against Eck* (August 1519); Luther, *Explanation of Theses Debated at Leipzig* (August 1519); Luther, *Defense against the Malicious Judgment of Eck* (September 1519); Luther, *On the Papacy in Rome, against the Most Celebrated Romanist in Leipzig* (June 1520); Luther, *Gloss, Preface and Afterword to Prierias' Epitome* (June 1520); Luther, *Why the Books of the Pope and His Disciples Were Burned by Doctor Martin Luther* (December 1520); Melanchthon, *Oration of Didymus Faventius against Thomas [Rhadinus Todiscus of] Placentia on Behalf of Martin Luther, Theologian* (February 1521); Luther, *Answer to the Hyperchristian . . . Book by Goat Emser in Leipzig* (March 1521); Luther, *Answer to the Book of Our Esteemed Master Ambrosius, the Keen Defender of Sylvester Prierias, with an Exposition of the Vision of the Antichrist, Daniel 8* (April 1521); Melanchthon, *Against the Furious Decree of the Parisian Theologasters, an Apology by Philip Melanchthon for Luther* (October 1521); Luther, *Against the Spiritual Estate of the Pope and Bishops Falsely So-Called* (July 1522).

of events following the Indulgence Controversy revealed a systematic attempt to silence and discredit Luther. This pattern of hostility certainly contributed to his evolving view of the papacy. One can, however, identify certain turning points as he moved to embrace the notion and the rhetorical commonplaces of the papal Antichrist. The first such transition came as a result of his study of church history and the papal decretals in preparation for the Leipzig Disputation. As he confessed in a letter to Spalatin dated March 13, 1519, "I am studying the papal decretals for my disputation. And, confidentially, I do not know whether the pope is the Antichrist himself or whether he is his apostle, so miserably is Christ (that is, the truth) corrupted and crucified by the pope in the decretals."²⁸ Luther further developed this line of thought in his *Explanation of Theses Debated at Leipzig*, where he charged that, if the pope claims sole authority to interpret scripture, he is worse than Lucifer and all the heretics. For Lucifer only wanted to be equal to God, but this claim would place the pope above God's word and thus above God himself. That, however, according to 2 Thessalonians 2 is a sign of the Antichrist.²⁹

The second major point in the evolution of Luther's view on the papal Antichrist occurred early in 1520, when he read Lorenzo Valla's *On the False Donation of Constantine* (1440).³⁰ Valla's treatise had circulated only in manuscript form until Ulrich von Hutten published it in Germany in 1518 and 1519. Through brilliant historical argumentation, Valla showed that Constantine would not have made such a donation nor would Pope Sylvester have accepted it. Valla further showed that the forgery was full of anachronistic Latin usage, which proved the document could not possibly date from the fourth century. From Valla, Luther learned two major points: first, popes had been abandoning their role as spiritual leader of the church for a very long time, and second, the Donation was "forged in order to despoil (*spoliare*) the empire from 'all [the] kings and princes of the West.'"³¹ As recent scholarship has shown, "it was this insight into the papacy's avaricious nature combined with the neglect of its proper spiritual role, that helped confirm for Luther that he faced not simply a corrupt and corrupting institution, but the very Antichrist itself."³² As Luther wrote in February 1520, "I am so tormented,

28. WABr, 1:359/28–31; LW, 48:114. See also Baumer, *Martin Luther und der Papst*, 54–57.

29. WA, 2:391–435; St.L., 18:820–75. See especially the explanation of Thesis 12: WA 2:430; St.L. 18:866.

30. See Whitford, "Papal Antichrist," 26–52.

31. Ibid., 30.

32. Ibid., 31; Valla, *On the Donation of Constantine*, trans. Bowersock.

I scarcely doubt that the pope is properly that Antichrist which by common consent the world expects; everything which he lives, does, speaks, and establishes fits so well.”³³

Three months after reading Valla, in his *On the Papacy in Rome against the Most Celebrated Romanist in Leipzig*, Luther wrote, “Why then does the Roman see so furiously desire the whole world? Why did it steal and rob country, city, indeed, principalities and kingdoms, and now dares to produce, ordain, dismiss, and change as it pleases all kings and princes, as if it were the Antichrist? Where is the figure fulfilled here?”³⁴ The papal Antichrist theme continued to appear in Luther’s other writings of 1520. For example, in the *Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, he characterized the papacy as “the kingdom of Babylon and the very Antichrist.”³⁵

The dénouement in Luther’s evolving antipapalism occurred when he received Leo’s *Exsurge domine* on October 10, 1520. At this point he became absolutely certain that the pope was the Antichrist.³⁶ Responding to the burning of his books at Cologne and Mainz, Luther and Melanchthon staged a dramatic bonfire outside Wittenberg’s city wall where they burned copies of the canon law, the popular confessional manual *Summa angelica*, writings of the Catholic controversialists Johann Eck and Hieronymus Emser, and a copy of the bull itself.³⁷ Shortly thereafter, Luther published *Why the Books of the Pope and His Disciples Were Burned*, in which he charged that the papal claim to be the sole interpreter of scripture set him above both God and man. Luther made clear that he was talking about the institution of the papacy as a collective Antichrist:

So now the saying of Paul is fulfilled, “the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship . . . by the activity of Satan,” and so on [2 Thess. 2:3–12]. When he calls him a man of lawlessness and a son of perdition, he does not mean his person alone, for that would cause little damage, but rather that his government is nothing else than sin and perdition and that he will rule only to lead all the world to sin and hell. It can readily be observed, then, and is clear from such articles that nothing

33. WABr 2:48/26–49/2, translated in Hendrix, *Luther and the Papacy*, 98.

34. *LW*, 39:84.

35. *LW*, 36:72.

36. Hendrix, *Luther and the Papacy*, 112.

37. See Luther’s letter to Spalatin, December 10, 1520, in *LW*, 48:186, esp. n1; WABr, 2:234.

except sin and perdition has come into the world through the pope, and more keeps coming daily.³⁸

By the time that Luther burned the papal bull, Melanchthon had also become persuaded that the pope was the Antichrist. In the placard he posted announcing the bonfire and inviting spectators, he wrote,

Let whosoever adheres to the truth of the gospel be present at nine o'clock at the church of the Holy Cross outside the walls, where the impious books of papal decrees and scholastic theology will be burnt according to ancient and apostolic usage, inasmuch as the boldness of the enemies of the gospel has waxed so great that they daily burn the evangelic books of Luther. Come, pious and zealous youth, to this pious and religious spectacle, for perchance now is the time when the Antichrist must be revealed!³⁹

The Wittenberg reformers embraced the notion that the papacy was the Antichrist as a consequence of insights gained from the Leipzig Disputation, conclusions drawn from Valla's treatise on the Donation of Constantine, and the realization of irreconcilability implicit in the bull *Exsurge domine*. The shared assumption that the institution of the papacy was the collective Antichrist forms an essential background to the publication of the pope-ass pamphlet. But before considering the content of this pamphlet, the publication project itself deserves attention.

The Publication of *The Pope-Ass Explained*

The publication project can be dated to the early part of 1523. It is clear that Luther had detailed information about the *monstrum* when he wrote his model sermon for the Second Sunday in Advent, that is, circa February 1522. If indeed he received a copy of the von Olmütz engraving at the same time he acquired Ulrichus Velenus's *Petrus Romam non venisse*, then he would have known of the Roman monster sometime before February 1521.⁴⁰ This chronology would have allowed sufficient time for Luther to share the image with Melanchthon and for the latter to ruminate on its meaning. As Luther

38. LW, 31:392.

39. WA, 7:183/1–9, translated in Smith, *Life and Letters of Martin Luther*, 100–101.

40. See chapter 2 above.

made clear in his Advent sermon, he understood the monster to signify the papacy and the impending end of the world.⁴¹

The editors of the Weimar edition of Luther's works agree with Konrad von Lange that Lucas Cranach the Elder was responsible for the woodcut illustration of the pope-ass (fig. 3) that accompanied Melanchthon's pamphlet.⁴² A careful comparison of the Bohemian (fig. 1) and the German versions of the monstrosity leads to some interesting conclusions. First, it seems clear that Wenzel von Olmütz's engraving served as the source for the pope-ass illustration. The layout, orientation, and architectural elements are quite similar in both pictures. They both show the Tiber, the Castel Sant'Angelo, and the Tor di Nona. Also, both represent an almost identical irregularity in the left bank of the Tiber, at the same location. However, there are some significant differences. The German version is much simpler; the figure of the ass is elongated and more dominant in the foreground. Gone is the amphora, the elegant flower (Wenzel's trademark), the pool of floodwater in which the monster stands, and the date "January 1496." The Tor di Nona is also quite elongated, and the belly of the monster obscures the bridge over the Tiber. The creature itself is also simplified: scales cover the knees, the pudendum is somewhat concealed, the dragon tail is less elaborate, and the dragon's tongue is missing. The river and the buildings no longer have identifying names written on them, and the phrase "Roma caput mundi" has become "Der Bapstesel zu Rom." Finally, the right arm, which in the Bohemian version was the end of an elephant's trunk, has become an elephant's foot.

Melanchthon's first effort at interpreting the *monstrum* was entitled *Figure of the Antichristian Pope and His Synagog* (*Figur des Antichristlichen Bapsts und seiner Synagog*).⁴³ In it, he used Latin scriptural references and included numerous foreign words. He rewrote this version in order to simplify it and cast it in a more popular style. In so doing, he eliminated the use of Latin, numbered his points (a convention Luther liked to use), and gave the work a new title: *The Pope-Ass Explained by Philip Melanchthon* (*Der Bapstesel durch Philippen Melanchthon deuttet*). He published this revised version both as a separate item⁴⁴ and as a joint publication with Luther's monk-calf polemic.

41. St.L., 11:56, par. 26.

42. WA, 11:359; Lange, *Papstesel*, 82.

43. WA, 11:363, 375–79.

44. Ibid., 11:363.

The joint publication appeared repeatedly in 1523, once in Low German.⁴⁵ In 1535, Melanchthon revised his pamphlet and Luther added an approbation known as his “Amen.” This version was printed several times and was translated into French, Dutch, Latin, and English (see chapter 5).⁴⁶

The Pope-Ass Explained: An Explication of the Text

A Figure of the Papal Antichrist

Melanchthon begins his pamphlet with two assertions: that divine portents are to be heeded and that the Roman monster is a figure of the papal Antichrist. He supports the validity and credibility of portents by making reference to Daniel 8. This chapter relates Daniel’s vision of a ram (the Medo-Persian Empire) being overpowered by a he-goat (Alexander the Great), only to be succeeded by Antiochus Epiphanes, whose sacrileges were the ultimate expression of wickedness, indicating that the last days were at hand. In making this reference, Melanchthon is arguing that divine portents foretell the course of history and warn of the end of time. But for Melanchthon a citation of Daniel 8 is also a reference to the papal Antichrist. In 1521, Luther wrote an *Exposition of the Vision of the Antichrist, Daniel 8*,⁴⁷ in which he associated Daniel’s vision with the Antichrist and the Antichrist with the corporate institution of the papacy. Thus, when Melanchthon states that Daniel 8 announces the Roman Antichrist [375/4], he is agreeing with Luther’s interpretation.

Not only are divine portents valid and credible, but the particular portent in question, the pope-ass, is a figure of the papal Antichrist, a synecdoche in which the individual monster found on the banks of the Tiber stands for the collective characteristics of the papacy. In medieval exegesis, the word *figura* is a term of art with a specific meaning. A *figura* is “something real and historical which announces something else that is also real and historical”;⁴⁸ in a *figura* both the sign and the signified share historicity. Figural prophecy makes possible the interpretation of one worldly event through another; “the first signifies the second, the second fulfills the first.”⁴⁹ Figural interpretation allowed medieval theologians to interpret persons and events from the Old Testament as theological prefigurations of persons or events in the New Testament. Thus,

45. Ibid., 11:361–63.

46. Ibid., 11: 364–66.

47. Ibid., 7:722–78; St.L., 18:1470–1583.

48. Auerbach, *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature*, 29.

49. Ibid., 58.

for example, Adam and Eve prefigure Christ and the church; crossing the Red Sea prefigures Christian baptism; and the brazen serpent in the wilderness prefigures Christ's propitiation on the cross.⁵⁰ In general, the Old Testament figures are physical, visible things, while their New Testament fulfillments are spiritual and invisible qualities.⁵¹ Within the medieval apocalyptic tradition, the dragon in Revelation as well as Cain, Judas, and Simon Magus are all figures of Antichrist.⁵² Melanchthon viewed the Roman monster not as folklore or as fiction, but as an historical reality that figured or portrayed the abstract qualities that comprise the very essence of the papacy. To explain this figure, Melanchthon analyzes the physiognomy of the monster, showing how each part of its anatomy stands for some quality or aspect of the papal realm. In so doing, he follows the late medieval commonplaces represented in *Anatomia Antichristi* (discussed in chapter 3).⁵³

The Head

Melanchthon begins by explicating the monster's head, arguing that the pope cannot be the head of the church. By choosing this topic as his opening salvo, Melanchthon not only throws himself into a very contentious topic, but he also puts forward a key concept of the new Lutheran ecclesiology. Before looking at his ecclesiological argument, one must understand why the headship title, the *caput ecclesiae*, was such a contentious issue.

One of the most forceful medieval proponents of the papal headship of the church was Pope Innocent III. He appropriated the title of Vicar of Christ solely for papal use, designating himself as the successor of Peter (rather than the Vicar of Peter), and the *caput ecclesiae*. Using a corporeal metaphor, he argued that just as the plenitude of the senses in the human body was concentrated in the head and emanated from there to the rest of the body, so the plenitude of power within the church was concentrated in the pope as its head and flowed down to the patriarchs, archbishops, and bishops.⁵⁴ In his decretal *Per venerabilem* (1202), he described himself as "the vicar of Him Who is priest in eternity according to the law of Melchizedek, and established by

50. See James, "Pictor in Carmine."

51. Luther makes this point in his *On the Papacy in Rome*; LW, 39:78.

52. Emmerson, *Antichrist in the Middle Ages*, 20.

53. See Buck, "Anatomia Antichristi," 349–68. Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature*, 181, characterize the anatomical explication of a monster as a "kind of point-by-point hermeneutics that treated the monster itself as a revealed text."

54. Schatz, *Papal Primacy*, 92.

God to be judge over the living and the dead.”⁵⁵ Again, in his decretal *Novit ille* (1204), he spoke of having been “called by the Highest disposition to the government of the whole Church.”⁵⁶ And in a letter to the Bishop of Fermo (1205), he gave one of the most comprehensive statements of his powers: “the Roman pontiff holds on earth the office of him who is the king of kings and the lord of lords . . . he not only holds the highest power in spiritual affairs, but truly even in temporal affairs he holds great power from the same lord.”⁵⁷

The hierocratic publicist Augustinus Triumphus (1243–1328) developed the idea of papal headship further, arguing that the pope is the head of “the whole mystical body of the Church.”⁵⁸ A contemporary of Augustinus was Pope Boniface VIII, the last pope before the crisis of Avignon and the Great Schism. In his struggle with King Philip IV of France, Boniface issued the famous *Unam sanctam* bull (1302) in which he reaffirmed the papal headship: “Therefore, in this one and only Church there is one body and one head . . . namely Christ and Peter, the Vicar of Christ, and the successor of Peter.”⁵⁹

After Boniface’s death, the papacy made the much-criticized move from Rome to Avignon (1305–78). Gregory XI (1370–78) finally returned the papal court to Rome, but shortly after his death the Great Schism (1378–1417) tore the Western church into competing pontifical camps. The theory of conciliarism provided a way out of the crisis of the Schism by vesting controlling authority over the church in a council rather than in the person of the pope. Conciliarism thus contradicted the notion that the pope was the head of the body of the church. The crowning achievement of the conciliar movement was the decree from the Council of Constance known as *Sacrosancta*, declaring the legitimacy of conciliar authority: “[the Council of Constance] declares that it is lawfully assembled in the Holy Spirit, constitutes a General Council, represents the Catholic Church and has immediate power from Christ to which anyone, of whatever status and condition, even if holding the Papal dignity, is bound to obey in matters pertaining to the Faith, extirpation of the schism and reformation of the said Church in head and members.”⁶⁰ Although the Council of Constance managed to end the Schism, many succeeding pontiffs

55. Ehler and Morrall, *Church and State through the Centuries*, 68.

56. *Ibid.*, 70.

57. Quoted in Pennington, “Pope Innocent III’s Views on Church and State,” 56.

58. Schatz, *Papal Primacy*, 94. See also Wilks, *Problem of Sovereignty in the Later Middle Ages*, 15–64.

59. Ehler and Morrall, *Church and State through the Centuries*, 91.

60. *Ibid.*, 105.

were unwilling to accept the negative implications of conciliarism for the papal headship of the church.

The most significant reassertion of papal headship of the church after the Council of Constance resulted from efforts to bring about reconciliation between the Roman and the Eastern churches in the face of the impending threat from the Turks. From 1438 to 1445, a council met first in Ferrara and then in Florence under the aegis of Pope Eugene IV and Cosimo de Medici. The Council of Florence crafted a Formula of Primacy, which once again asserted papal headship over the church:

We also define that the holy apostolic see and the Roman pontiff holds the primacy over the whole world and the Roman pontiff is the successor of blessed Peter prince of the apostles, and that he is the true vicar of Christ, the head of the whole church and the father and teacher of all Christians, and to him was committed in blessed Peter the full power of tending, ruling, and governing the whole church, as is contained also in the acts of ecumenical councils and in the sacred canons.⁶¹

While the Formula of Primacy seems definitive and clear, it did not settle the matter of *caput ecclesiae* once and for all, because the French challenged the ecumenicity of the council and the validity of its actions. Pope Pius II (1458–64) therefore once again reasserted papal primacy and headship. In the bull *Execrabilis* (1460), he forbade appeal of pontifical decisions to a future council. Further, in the bull entitled *In minoribus agentes* (1463), Pius restated his claim of headship using the familiar corporeal metaphor: “the body of the Church is not without a head and all power flows from the head into the members.”⁶² Historically, the concept of *caput ecclesiae* had implications for papal power over the clerical hierarchy, papal supremacy over church councils, and papal authority over secular rulers.

When Melanchthon begins his pamphlet with an attack on the papal headship of the church, he not only addresses a controversial topic of long standing, he also endorses a new Lutheran ecclesiology. He states his argument simply and directly: “For the church is a spiritual body and a spiritual realm, gathered in the spirit. For that reason, it should and can have neither a corporeal head nor an external lord” [375/13–15]. This argument is one that Luther had made at Leipzig. As Melanchthon reported, Eck argued “that the church cannot be

61. Schatz, *Papal Primacy*, 188.

62. Oberman, Zerfoss, and Courtenay, *Defensorium obedientiae apostolicae*, 365.

without a head since it is a civil body. Therefore, the pope is by divine right the head of the church.” Luther responded, “Christ himself is the head, and since the church is a spiritual kingdom, it needs no other head.”⁶³

Professor Scott Hendrix has shown that Luther had developed the framework for his new understanding of the church when he wrote his *Dic-tata super psalterium* (1513–15). In his lectures on the Psalms, Luther had defined the church as a community of the faithful whose faith is sustained by the gospel. This *fides*-ecclesiology differed from the medieval Catholic *caritas*-ecclesiology. In the latter, the mark of the true Christian was *caritas*, the grace given the believer through the sacraments administered by the clergy. For Luther, faith was nourished by the gospel and was not based on the sacraments or dependent upon the clerical hierarchy.⁶⁴ To quote Luther, “Wherever the Word of God is preached and believed, there is true faith, an unshakeable rock. Where faith is, there is the Church. Wherever the church is, there is the bride of Christ; where the bride of Christ is, there is everything that belongs to the bridegroom. Thus faith contains everything which follows from faith: keys, sacraments, authority, and everything else.”⁶⁵

In his explanation of the ass’s head, Melanchthon reflects the new Lutheran *fides*-ecclesiology, which he himself has clearly embraced. But he also picks up on another point. In his opening remarks at Leipzig, Eck had said, “What a monster would the Church be without a head!”⁶⁶ Melanchthon in essence turns Eck’s argument against him by portraying the church with the pope at its head as a monstrosity: “For, just as an ass’s head makes no sense on a human body, so the pope makes no sense as the head of the church” [375/19–20].

The Right Hand

After discussing the head, Melanchthon begins to work his way down the monster’s body, starting with the right hand, the elephant’s foot. He asserts that it signifies the spiritual power of the pope, which tramples upon weak consciences and destroys souls by heaping unbearable laws and misery upon them [375/22–25]. Here Melanchthon is referring to the theology of salvific

63. MSW, 25. In his *On the Papacy in Rome*, Luther makes this same argument; LW 39:65–76. See also Hendrix, *Luther and the Papacy*, 105.

64. Hendrix, *Ecclesia in via*, 198–212, esp. 208.

65. WA, 2:208, translation in Brendler, *Martin Luther*, 152.

66. Dau, *Leipzig Debate in 1519*, 132; Seitz, *Text der Leipziger Disputation*, 57.

meritorious works. The Wittenberg reformers reject the idea that meritorious works play a role in salvation, arguing instead for solifidianism, justification by faith alone, from which good behavior should flow as an expression of faith. Melanchthon asserts that the spiritual power of the papacy is based on a belief in the efficacy of works, which has led to a religious life focused on externals—ceremonies and rituals understood to work mechanically and to be efficacious apart from an individual's feelings or inner spiritual life.

The early Protestant reformers were highly critical of external, ceremonial, works-based religious practices. They argued that individuals could never know for sure if they had done enough works to guarantee their eternal salvation. In the reformers' eyes, late medieval Christians lived in a state of perpetual uncertainty, performing good works such as going on pilgrimages, venerating relics, purchasing indulgences, making annual required confessions, and doing works of satisfaction as required by the sacrament of penance. Luther and his early supporters characterized this external religiosity with words such as anxiety, anguish, torment, spiritual tyranny, and psycho-terror.⁶⁷ No doubt, many believers found comfort in indulgences, pilgrimages, relics, etc. But the volume and content of early sixteenth-century Protestant publications suggests that others longed for a more robust inner spiritual life, along the lines of Luther's "Christian freedom," the freedom from external works defined and promoted by the clergy.

In attacking formalized, external religious observances, Melanchthon focuses on the following specifics: coerced confession, chastity, vows, false masses, false penance, dispensation from oaths, indulgences, and relics [376/7–9]. This list is representative of the issues that Luther, Melanchthon, and other reformers were discussing in their writings in the years just prior to publication of the pope-ass treatise. They are code words that reference specific polemical treatises and/or controversies, which in turn provide the context for each of these complaints.

Indulgences and False Penance

By the sixteenth century, indulgences had developed into an essential part of the sacrament of penance. In the early church, penance involved four steps:

67. Ozment, *Reformation in the Cities*, 22–120, gives an excellent discussion of external religiosity at the close of the Middle Ages. The reformer John Oecolampadius used the word "psychotyranni" to refer to father confessors in his *A Paradox: Christian Confession Is Not Onerous*; see Ozment, *Reformation in the Cities*, 51.

contrition, confession, performance of a work of satisfaction, and absolution. In practice, it became customary to grant absolution before the performance of a work of satisfaction. Absolution removed both guilt and eternal punishment, but it did not remove temporal punishment during the penitent's life or in purgatory. An indulgence, however, could cancel some or all of the temporal punishment that a priest had imposed upon the penitent for the expiation of sin. To explain how indulgences actually worked, theologians developed the "treasury of merit" doctrine, which Pope Clement VI formally sanctioned in 1343.⁶⁸ This teaching held that Christ and the saints had built up a surplus of good works, held in a treasury of merit, upon which the pope could draw to compensate for the sins of the faithful. The last step in the development of late medieval indulgence practice came in 1476 when Pope Sixtus IV asserted jurisdiction over the souls of the departed by offering an indulgence to shorten a soul's stay in purgatory. Thus, by the end of the Middle Ages, popes were offering plenary indulgences for the cancellation of all temporal penalties, which could be attained both for the living and for the dead and which could be had for a monetary contribution to a specific cause of the church.⁶⁹

The particular indulgence to which Luther reacted in 1517 was a plenary indulgence authorized by Pope Leo X, applicable to nearly all sins. It was to be preached in the ecclesiastical provinces of Mainz and Magdeburg and in Brandenburg; one half of the income was to go to Rome to help pay for the construction of St. Peter's, the other half was to be used to help pay for the costs Albert of Hohenzollern had incurred in his acquisition of the archbishopric of Mainz, an office he held together with his other positions as archbishop of Magdeburg and administrator of Halberstadt.⁷⁰

Archbishop Albert issued detailed instructions regarding the offering of these indulgences. While they were being preached, all other sermons were to stop. The indulgence preachers were to emphasize the availability of complete remission of sins for the living and the remission of punishment for the departed in purgatory.⁷¹ The Dominican Johann Tetzel was in charge of

68. Clement VI sanctioned the treasury of merit in the bull *Unigenitus dei filius*.

69. For a good discussion of the history of indulgences and their relation to the sacrament of penance, see Elizabeth Vodola, "Indulgences," in DMA, 6:46–50; Grimm, *Reformation Era*, 38–41; Schwiebert, *Luther and His Times*, 303–14; Brecht, *Martin Luther, 1483–1521*, 176–78; LW, 31:19–21.

70. Schwiebert, *Luther and His Times*, 306–14; Brecht, *Martin Luther, 1483–1521*, 178–83.

71. Hillerbrand, *Reformation: Narrative History*, 37–41.

this enterprise. A clever marketer, he used fear and intimidation in his sales pitch.⁷² These indulgences were not available in the territory of Electoral Saxony, but Luther's parishioners went to the nearby Brandenburg towns of Jüterbog and Zerst, where they acquired them and brought them back to Wittenberg. When Luther attempted to reprimand his parishioners in the confessional, they showed him their newly acquired indulgence letters and threatened to report him if he refused to recognize their validity. At this point Luther felt compelled to speak out.

But it wasn't only Tetzel's jubilee indulgence that distressed Luther. A number of pilgrimage churches also had the right to offer indulgences; one of these was the Castle Church at Wittenberg. Here Luther's pious prince, Frederick the Wise, housed his large collection of relics: milk from the Blessed Virgin, pieces of her hair, a scrap of Jesus' diaper, straw from the nativity manger, a part of Jesus' beard, and a nail from the crucifixion, among thousands of other items.⁷³ Each year during the week following the festival of All Saints' Day (November 1) a throng of penitents engulfed the Castle Church to venerate the relics and acquire indulgences. Luther's choice of the eve of All Saints' Day as the occasion for issuing his Ninety-Five Theses constituted a rejection of the indulgence traffic at the Castle Church.

Four important sources document Luther's condemnation of the indulgence trade: the Ninety-Five Theses (1517), the letter "To Cardinal Albrecht, Archbishop of Mainz" (1517), the *Explanations of the Ninety-Five Theses* (1518), and the *Sermon on Indulgence and Grace* (1518). Today, the most famous of these works is the Ninety-Five Theses,⁷⁴ the common name for the *Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences*. He wrote these in Latin to serve as the basis for a scholarly disputation, and he sent them to Archbishop Albert and Bishop Jerome Schulz (Hieronymus Scultetus) of Brandenburg for their review and assessment.⁷⁵ Within days, however, the theses were reprinted; the next

72. Ibid., 41–43.

73. Ibid., 47–49.

74. WA, 1:233–38; LW, 31:25–33.

75. There is a significant scholarly dispute over the posting of the theses on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg. Iserloh, *The Theses Were Not Posted*, argues that Luther mailed his theses to his ecclesiastical superiors but did not nail them to the door of the Castle Church. Smith, "Luther and the Iserloh Thesis from a Numismatic Perspective," agrees with Iserloh, see 184n4. For a review of the posting debate, see Rublack, "Neuere Forschungen zum Thesenanschlag Luthers." Junghans, "Luther's Wittenberg," 26, argues that the theses were indeed posted. For other discussions of the debate, see Brecht, *Martin Luther, 1483–1521*, 200–202; Oberman, *Masters of the Reformation*, 148–50n88. After a thorough review of the available evidence Oberman concludes that the Ninety-Five Theses were posted.

month a German translation became available.⁷⁶ As Luther's friend Friedrich Myconius wrote, "But hardly fourteen days had passed when these propositions were known throughout Germany and within four weeks almost all of Christendom was familiar with them."⁷⁷

The first four theses embody the core of the entire document—that penance entails an inward change in attitude and not merely the mechanical performance of the sacrament of penance, a false penance.⁷⁸ Luther goes on to assert that the pope's power does not extend to the souls in purgatory, that giving to the poor or lending to the needy is a better deed than buying an indulgence, that preaching the gospel should not be stopped in deference to the preaching of indulgences, that the pope should build St. Peter's out of his own vast wealth rather than taking money from "poor believers," and that penitent Christians should not seek exemption from punishment but rather forgiveness and spiritual improvement.⁷⁹

Luther composed his letter to the archbishop of Mainz to accompany a copy of the Ninety-Five Theses that he sent the archbishop. He requested that Albert stop the sale of indulgences within his territories, noting, "Evidently the poor souls believe that when they have bought indulgence letters they are assured of their salvation. They are likewise convinced that souls escape from purgatory as soon as they have placed a contribution in the chest."⁸⁰

Though the Ninety-Five Theses received a warm popular reception, the clerical establishment was much less positive. Members of Luther's own Augustinian order feared he would bring disgrace on his confreres; Tetzl braggad that he would have Luther burned as a heretic; many of Luther's colleagues at the university were at first cool in their support.⁸¹ He therefore decided to write a much longer explanation of the theses. He planned the work in late 1517, finished a draft by March 1518 and sent it to his superior, Bishop Schulz of Brandenburg. However, due to Bishop Schulz's opposition, Luther did not publish the treatise until August 1518.

76. The Nuremberg patrician Caspar Nützel made one of the German translations of the theses, see Brecht, *Martin Luther, 1483–1521*, 204.

77. Hillerbrand, *Reformation: Narrative History*, 47; Myconius, *Historia reformationis*, 21–23.

78. *LW*, 31:22, 25.

79. *LW*, 31:25–33; *WA*, 1:233–38; Boehmer, *Road to Reformation*, 186–89.

80. *LW*, 48:46; *WABr*, 1:110–12.

81. Boehmer, *Road to Reformation*, 191–93.

The *Explanations of the Ninety-Five Theses*⁸² is a long and ponderous treatise in which Luther presents the arguments he would make in an actual disputation. The style is scholastic and logical rather than rhetorical. The tone reveals an inner tension between a professed obedience to the pope and a harsh combativeness against the criticisms of Johann Tetzel. Luther submits himself to instruction from his ecclesiastical superiors, yet shows a willingness to break from the church where he feels that its practices contradict the doctrine of justification by faith. Luther intended this treatise for a narrow, academic audience; he ended it with an apology, of sorts, to the general reader: "TO THE SINCERE AND LEARNED READER, Do not assume that these things were published for you, my learned and brilliant reader. . . . You have other things which you may read according to your own inclination."⁸³

For the literate layman, his "sincere and learned reader," Luther published the *Sermon on Indulgence and Grace* (March 1518),⁸⁴ a short work he wrote in German that proved to be quite popular; in 1518 thirteen printings came out, in 1519 there were five more printings, and in 1520 an additional four.⁸⁵ Luther crafted his tract for an audience already aware of the Ninety-Five Theses. His main point is that indulgences lead people away from doing works of love and mercy towards their neighbors: "it is much better to do one good work than to be excused many. An indulgence, however, excuses many a good work, but otherwise effects nothing. . . . [I]f you are minded to make a gift, your very first obligation is to an indigent neighbor, and not to the building of St. Peter's or to buying an indulgence."⁸⁶

False Masses

In *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520),⁸⁷ *The Misuse of the Mass* (1522),⁸⁸ and *A Treatise on the New Testament, that is, the Holy Mass* (1520),⁸⁹ Luther articulates his principal complaints about the church's teachings and practices regarding the mass. Melancthon reflects many of the same ideas in

82. *LW*, 31:83–252; *WA*, 1:525–628.

83. *LW*, 31:252.

84. *WA*, 1:239–46; *St.L.*, 18:270–75; Luther, *Reformation Writings*, trans. Lee-Woolf 1:50–55.

85. *St.L.*, 18:270n.

86. Luther, *Reformation Writings*, trans. Lee-Woolf, 1:53.

87. *LW*, 36:19–57; *WA*, 6:502–26.

88. *LW*, 36:133–230; *WA*, 8:482–563.

89. *LW*, 35:77–111; *PE*, 1:294–326; *WA*, 6:349–78.

Propositions on the Mass (1521),⁹⁰ and in *Loci communes* (1521), especially in the section entitled “Participation in the Lord’s Table.”⁹¹ Rejecting the church’s teachings, Luther argues that the mass is not a good work, it is not a merit-generating sacrifice, it does not work mechanically (*ex opere operato*),⁹² and it cannot benefit another person (or cause) other than the participating communicant. The *Loci communes* briefly states the Lutheran position: Communion is a sign of grace; participation in the Lord’s Supper does not destroy sin, “but faith destroys it, and faith is strengthened by this sign.”⁹³ If the mass is not a sacrifice or a meritorious good work, then it does not generate merit that can be communicated to the departed in purgatory or directed toward any other votive purpose.⁹⁴ This new understanding subverted the basis for endowed chantries and purgatory masses, thus freeing up a vast resource of wealth.

Coerced Confession

In 1215, the Fourth Lateran Council issued the decree *Omnis utriusque sexus* that mandated annual confession for all Christians. This decree led canonists and theologians to focus on the practice of auricular confession, specifically on the power of the father confessor and the qualities of a “good” and “complete” confession. The confessor was both investigator and judge; he offered absolution but he also imposed appropriate works of satisfaction. Absolution removed guilt and eternal punishment, but it did not remove temporal punishment on earth and in purgatory. The medieval penitent’s confession needed to be both “good” and “complete.” A “good” confession was simple, humble, pure, discreet, willing, tearful, prompt, and strong.⁹⁵ A “complete” confession was methodical, deliberate, and extensive. To facilitate completeness, the penitent was urged to examine his conscience according to categories of sins, using, for example, the five senses, the Ten Commandments, or the seven deadly sins to guide his introspection.

The confessional literature of the late Middle Ages considered sexual sins one of the most basic of moral topics. The church made the control of

90. *MSW*, 6:63–67.

91. Melancthon, *Loci communes*, 145–47.

92. *Ex opere operato* (from the work done) holds that the sacrament produces grace of itself, independent of the faith or morality of the celebrant and communicants.

93. Melancthon, *Loci communes*, 145.

94. *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, in *LW*, 36:51.

95. Tentler, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation*, 107. For a discussion of the good and complete confession, see *ibid.*, 104–33.

sexual behavior a cornerstone of its whole disciplinary structure.⁹⁶ For example, the authors of confessional manuals developed lists of appropriate and inappropriate positions for intercourse. They also developed hierarchies of sexual offenses, ranging from unchaste kiss and unchaste touch (least offensive) to sodomy, bestiality, and “woman on top” (most offensive).

Luther rejected both the requirement for a complete confession and the detailed inquiry into “secret sins” (his term for sexual offenses). In *A Discussion on How Confession Should Be Made*, he discards all mnemonic aids for a “complete” confession. The penitent about to make confession should do away with the confusion of distinctions such as “what [sins have been committed] against the three theological virtues . . . and against the four cardinal virtues; what through the five senses, through the seven mortal sins, against the seven sacraments, against the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, against the eight Beatitudes. . . . For this most hateful and tedious catalogue of distinctions is utterly useless, indeed, altogether harmful.”⁹⁷ Regarding the confession of “secret sins,” Luther speculates that it “was all the invention either of avaricious or inquisitive prelates, or certainly tyrannical ones.”⁹⁸ He asserts that it is not necessary to confess “simple thoughts about a virgin or a woman, nor, on the other hand, a woman’s thoughts about a young man; nor affections themselves or the ardor of mutual lust, or the inclination toward the opposite sex, however filthy. . . .”⁹⁹

*[Coerced] Chastity*¹⁰⁰

Luther’s attitude towards “secret sins” reveals his judgment that sexuality is an essential part of human nature, which cannot be denied or successfully repressed. Confession should, therefore, be made only regarding those secret sins “which involve full consent to the deed.”¹⁰¹ Luther condemns clerical celibacy, which he characterizes as all but impossible: “For human frailty does not

96. Tentler, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation*, xix. See also Tentler, “Summa for Confessors as an Instrument of Social Control.”

97. LW, 39:36–37; WA, 6:163.

98. LW, 39:33.

99. LW, 39:33–34.

100. In the first version of Melancthon’s text (indicated as version α in WA, 11:375ff.) the author uses the phrase “erzwungen keuscheit” (“coerced chastity”) [376/30]. The A1 text, omits the word “erzwungen” before “keuscheit.” However, in its historical context, the meaning is “coerced chastity” consistent with the α text.

101. *A Discussion on How Confession Should Be Made* (1520), in LW, 39:34.

permit a man to live chastely, but only the strength of angels and the power of heaven.”¹⁰² He charges that the pope, through his “intolerable and destructive law of celibacy for all priests . . . causes them of necessity to fornicate.”¹⁰³ The pope forces his priests to do the impossible and then “permits their fornication with impunity whereby he has increased fornication and sodomy and filled the world with these sins.”¹⁰⁴

Though Luther views clerical celibacy as self-defeating, he nevertheless calls for a chaste lifestyle for all believers. He insists that “gluttony, drunkenness, lying late abed, loafing, and being without work” are all vices by which chastity is quickly overcome.¹⁰⁵ He wants brothels closed¹⁰⁶ and he condemns the sale of obscene pilgrim badges: “What is it that they [the Romanists] sell? Vulvas and genitals . . . , the pudenda of both sexes, or (as the Scriptures say) ‘shame and nakedness.’”¹⁰⁷ He also calls for reform of laws relating to adultery among relatives. If a man had relations with a sister-in-law or someone else related to him with any degree of consanguinity, he was no longer allowed to have sexual relations with his wife, but he was also not allowed to leave his wife’s bed: “they [the clergy] put a man into the lap of a naked woman and forbid him to touch her or to know her.”¹⁰⁸ The reformers’ attitude on chastity might best be described as strict morality tempered with common sense.

Vows

The issue of clerical celibacy and the inviolability of vows are inextricably intertwined. During the course of 1521, both Melancthon and Luther wrote treatises dealing with these topics. While Luther was in hiding at the Wartburg, parish priests sympathetic to the Reformation began to act on their conviction that clerical celibacy was not binding. One such case involved Jacob Seidler of Glasshütte in Meissen, who served a parish that lay within the territory of Duke George. This implacable opponent of Luther had Pastor

102. *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation* (1520), in *LW*, 44:177.

103. *The Misuse of the Mass* (1521), in *LW*, 36:206.

104. *Ibid.* The reference here is to the concubinage fee that a priest gave to his bishop for keeping a concubine and to the cradle fee that a priest paid as penalty for begetting illegitimate offspring. See Scribner, “Anticlericalism and the German Reformation,” 246.

105. *A Treatise on Good Works* (1520), in *PE*, 1:276; and *WA*, 6:269.

106. *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation* (1520), in *LW*, 44:214–15.

107. *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520), in *LW*, 36:97; regarding obscene pilgrim badges, see Jones, *Secret Middle Ages*, 256.

108. *A Discussion on How Confession Should Be Made* (1520), in *LW*, 39:45.

Seidler arrested, imprisoned, and eventually executed, in spite of Melanchthon's efforts to defend him.¹⁰⁹ Another cleric who married was Bartholomew Bernhardi of Feldkirch, one of Luther's former students. Archbishop Albert demanded that Elector Frederick surrender Bernhardi to him; Frederick refused. In defense of Bernhardi, Melanchthon wrote an apology that was translated into German and published as *Priests May Take Wives*.¹¹⁰ Here he argues that neither scripture nor the traditions of the early church call for clerical celibacy. On the contrary, St. Paul recommends that bishops be the "husband of one wife" (1 Timothy 3:2). Because of the "frailty of the flesh," Bernhardi was not able to keep his vow of celibacy and should not be forced to do so merely for the sake of human traditions. Melanchthon's intercession helped save Bernhardi's life.

In the *Loci communes*, Melanchthon includes a section entitled "The Vows of Monks." Here he argues that vows amount to a kind of slavery to the idea that one can earn salvation through works: "the custom of making vows has been accepted only because faith and evangelical freedom have been ignored," and they are "at variance with faith and the freedom of the spirit."¹¹¹

Luther addressed vows in a general sense in a number of his early writings,¹¹² making the point that vows to go on a pilgrimage or give money to a monastery are intended as meritorious good works and therefore are contradictory to justification by faith. In his *Judgment of Martin Luther on Monastic Vows* (written 1521; published 1522) he focuses particularly on monks.¹¹³ Here he argues that monastic vows are not commanded in scripture, foster a belief in salvation by works rather than by faith, promote a dual morality setting clergy above the laity, curtail acts of charity, and contravene the inextinguishable nature of human sexuality.¹¹⁴

109. Philip Melanchthon, Johannes Agricola, and Andreas Karlstadt unsuccessfully attempted to intervene with the bishop of Meissen on behalf of Jacob Seidler. Seidler became the first recorded martyr for the ideas of the Reformation. See CR 1:418–21, item 119; Melanchthon, *Briefwechsel*, 1:99, items 152 and 153; Manschreck, *Melanchthon*, 71–72.

110. CR 1:421–40; Maurer, *Der junge Melanchthon*, 2:170; Manschreck, *Melanchthon*, 72; LW, 44:245–46; Lea, *History of Sacerdotal Celibacy in the Christian Church*, 355–56; Brecht, *Martin Luther, 1521–1532*, 21–22.

111. Melanchthon, *Loci communes*, 59.

112. See, for example, *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, *The Misuse of the Mass*, *A Discussion on How Confession Should Be Made*, and *A Treatise on the New Testament, that is, the Holy Mass*.

113. LW, 44:245–400.

114. These general points are argued in great detail throughout Luther's treatise; see *ibid*.

The Left Hand

The monster's left hand is human in form, signifying the pope's claims to secular jurisdiction. Melanchthon asserts that the pope has managed to make himself a lord over kings and princes, whom he has recruited for his own maintenance and defense. The hand is human to make the point that papal secular jurisdiction has come about not through scriptural justification, but through "human presumption" [376/20–377/5]. Melanchthon here is offering a digest of the ideas that Luther puts forth against papal claims to temporal authority in his *Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation* (1520). Luther's arguments thus provide the context for Melanchthon's interpretation of the monster's left hand.

Chapter 1 has already reviewed many of the key points that the papacy made to justify its claims to secular authority. Briefly, these arguments are as follows: (1) The pope is the heir of St. Peter (*indignus haeres beati Petri*), the Vicar of Christ, and the possessor of the power of the keys; as such, he has authority superior to that of temporal rulers just as the soul is superior to the temporal body and the clergy is superior to the laity. As Gregory VII's *Dictatus papae* stated, "the Pope is the only one whose feet are to be kissed by all princes," and he "may depose Emperors."¹¹⁵ (2) The Donation of Constantine, accepted as genuine until Lorenzo Valla's analysis became public, links papal secular jurisdiction in the West to a gift from the hallowed Christian ruler Emperor Constantine. (3) The theory of the translation of the Empire (*translatio imperii*) asserts that since Pope Leo III had the power to transfer the imperial title from Byzantium to Aachen, successor popes likewise have the power to make and unmake emperors.¹¹⁶

Luther repudiates these doctrines using both scriptural and historical arguments, drawing examples from the most politically engaged of all Renaissance popes, Julius II (1503–13). As already noted, Luther read Valla's exposé on the Donation of Constantine in February 1520, four months before he penned the *Address*. He does not bother restating Valla's points; he merely calls the Donation such a crude and clumsy lie "that I should imagine any drunken peasant could lie more adroitly and skillfully."¹¹⁷ Regarding the *translatio imperii*, Luther notes that the Romanists robbed the Greek emperor

115. See Ehler and Morrall, *Church and State*, 44.

116. See chapter 1 for a full discussion of these topics.

117. *LW*, 44:166.

of his title and, in so doing, “brought the power of the Roman Empire under their control so they could parcel it out themselves. . . . The empire was taken away from the emperor at Constantinople, and its very name and title given to us Germans. Through this we became servants of the pope.”¹¹⁸

Papal decrees used to justify secular jurisdiction also come under Luther's scrutiny. For example, he asserts, “The chapter *Solite*, which sets papal authority above imperial authority, is not worth a cent, and the same goes for all those who base their authority on it or pay any deference to it.”¹¹⁹ Here Luther is referring to *Solitae benignitatis* (1201), the letter Innocent III wrote to Alexius III, emperor of Constantinople, reminding him that just as the soul is superior to the body, so the pope's power to bind or loose sins transcends the empire's earthly jurisdiction.¹²⁰ Luther also rejected the decretal *Pastoralis*: “It is also ridiculous and childish for the pope, on the basis of such perverted and deluded reasoning, to claim in his decretal *Pastoralis* that he is the rightful heir to the empire in the event of a vacancy.”¹²¹ In 1313 Pope Clement V (1305–14) issued the bull *Pastoralis cura*, in which he asserted papal superiority over the empire by expanding on the idea that the pope becomes the emperor when there is a vacancy, to assert his right to appoint imperial vicars during imperial vacancies.¹²² Luther argues that there is no scriptural basis for this claim; in fact, he cites the same Bible passage that Melanchthon uses [376/17], Luke 22:25–26, to document that the pope should have no secular authority: “The princes of the Gentiles are lords, but it shall not be so among you.” Luther rejects this decretal as a “shameless, gross, and idiotic” lie.¹²³

Another line of argument in the *Address* has to do with the symbolic ritual of papal-imperial relations. Luther argues, for example, that the emperor should never hold the pope's “stirrup or the bridle of his mule when he mounts to go riding.”¹²⁴ This is a reference to the custom of the emperor serving as *strator* for the pope as a sign of honor and subservience, i.e., leading the pope's mount while holding bridle and stirrup. Some emperors served as the

118. Ibid., 44:208.

119. Ibid., 44:165.

120. Cassell, *Monarchia Controversy*, 9; Tierney, *Crisis of the Church and State*, 133.

121. LW, 44:165–66.

122. Cassell, *Monarchia Controversy*, 204.

123. LW, 44:166.

124. Ibid., 44:164.

pope's *strator*, others, like Frederick Barbarossa, refused to do so. Luther adds, "still less should [the emperor] do homage and swear faithful allegiance to the pope as the popes brazenly demand as though they had a right to it."¹²⁵ An additional sign of reverence was kissing the feet of the pope. Luther says, "We should never again yield to that devilish pride which requires the emperor to kiss the pope's feet."¹²⁶ These various practical and theoretical criticisms of papal jurisdictional claims form the context for Melanchthon's comments regarding the monster's humanoid hand.

The Right Foot

The monster's right foot is the cloven hoof of an ox, a metaphor for the servants of the papal regime—clergy and scholastic theologians. Here Melanchthon again references issues to be found in the polemical and theological writings of the Wittenberg reformers in the years leading up to 1523. The criticism of the clergy harks back to the discussion of the right hand/elephant's foot, where the "unbearable laws of the pope (mentioned above)" [377/12] are first discussed. The attack on the clergy focuses not on the "unbearable laws" as such, but rather on the clergy, who observe and perform the rites and rituals that Melanchthon lists in the earlier paragraph: coerced confession, celibacy, false masses, false penance, indulgences, etc. By serving as the agents that perpetuate these ceremonial/ritual/sacramental observances, which are based on a belief in meritorious good works, they keep the wretched consciences of the poor common people "trapped under the elephant's foot" [377/14]. In addition to teachers, preachers, pastors, and confessors, Melanchthon singles out Scholastic theologians for special criticism. Here he is making reference to the attack on Scholasticism contained in several of his and Luther's important early writings. Whereas the clergy are the practitioners of the papal regime, the theologians are its theoreticians. Together they comprise the "pillars, footing, and foundation" [377/15] of the papacy.

Underlying the criticism of both the clergy and the theologians is a rejection of the salvific efficacy of good works in favor of the doctrine of justification by faith. Melanchthon's "unbearable laws" include a variety of religious requirements and practices that assume the Scholastic doctrine of merit, the teaching that the individual can play a role in his salvation by doing meritorious good works—vowing to be celibate, promising to make a pilgrimage,

125. *Ibid.*, 44:164–65.

126. *Ibid.*, 44:164.

endowing purgatory masses, doing works of satisfaction, purchasing indulgences, etc. Melanchthon describes Scholastic theology as “imagined, fabricated, and damned demonic prattle and monkish daydreams” [377/16–17]. To place this attack into its historic context, it is necessary to review the content of the doctrine of merit and the reformers’ rejection of it.

With the phrase “demonic prattle and monkish daydreams,” Melanchthon describes the voluminous and complex tradition of medieval Scholasticism—Thomism, Albertism, Scotism, Ockhamism, and Augustinianism.¹²⁷ Luther was trained in the nominalist tradition of William of Ockham (d. 1349) and Gabriel Biel (d. 1495). While always retaining an important role for God’s grace within the formula for salvation, Ockhamist theology emphasizes the ability of human free will to make moral choices that are pleasing to God and for which God rewards the believer with the gift of grace. Within this nominalist tradition, a believer who loves God does his best on the basis of natural moral ability (*facere quod in se est*). For this he is rewarded with an infusion of congruent grace (*meritum de congruo*); at this stage he has a kind of semi-merit. Now, however, his moral efforts, aided with congruent grace, can achieve full merit, condignant grace (*meritum de condigno*), and divine acceptance.¹²⁸

The Lutheran doctrine of justification by faith removes meritorious good works from the formula for salvation. According to Luther, the individual Christian believer is made righteous by faith and is thereafter to live his life in the presence of God and in service to his neighbor. Nothing he can do can in any way help merit the grace that flows freely from a loving and forgiving God. Luther and Melanchthon frame their attack against Scholasticism in terms of free will. The reformers insist that the human will is tainted by sin and therefore incapable of making moral choices that are meritorious in the eyes of an all-perfect God. Melanchthon, for example, does not dispute a certain freedom of choice in outward, external acts, but that is not the issue. Rather, the issue is the will and its relation to its internal disposition, state of mind, or affection. Affection controls the will and is itself controlled by sin.¹²⁹

As early as 1516 Luther wrote, “Oblivious to the righteousness of God, which is given freely and most abundantly to us in Christ, they [those who follow the Scholastic doctrine of merit] try to perform good works with

127. Janz, “Late Medieval Theology.”

128. Ozment, *Age of Reform 1250–1550*, 233–34; Fife, *Revolt of Martin Luther*, 158; Mackinnon, *Luther and the Reformation*, 1:63–79; Oberman, *Harvest of Medieval Theology*, 170–78, 184.

129. Melanchthon, *Loci communes*, 22–30; MSW, 83–85.

their own resources in an effort to reach the point where they are confident of standing before God on the basis of good deeds and merits. This is impossible!”¹³⁰ In theses that he drafted for his student Bartholomew Bernhardt (1516), Luther wrote that the believer cannot prepare himself for grace either *de congruo* or *de condigno*.¹³¹ A year later he drafted theses for another student, Franz Günther, for a disputation against Scholastic theology. Here he specifically attacked teachings of William of Ockham, Duns Scotus, and Gabriel Biel. For example, thesis 10: “One must concede that the will is not free to strive toward whatever is declared good. This in opposition to Scotus and Gabriel [Biel].”¹³² Several of the theses for the Heidelberg Disputation (1518) also contradict the doctrine of merit. For example, thesis 13 states, “Free will, after the fall, exists in name only, and as long as it does what it is able to do, it commits a mortal sin.”¹³³ In the sermon Luther preached at the beginning of the Leipzig Debate, he began with a section concerning free will and good works, thus using this very public forum to explain his teaching that one “should despair completely of oneself and by no means rely upon one’s free will, even to perform the smallest of works.”¹³⁴

Melanchthon was also quite outspoken against the doctrine of merit. In an oration delivered at Wittenberg for the observance of the Day of the Conversion of St. Paul, he contrasts Pauline theology and Scholastic philosophy. Here he condemns the doctrine of merit using the language of a classicist: “for the virtue that is gained by human exertion is masked and is plainly playing the role of some preposterous silenus, resplendent in outer appearance, but if you should examine it, you would discover nothing but the foulest of passions.”¹³⁵ In his *Oration of Didymus Faventius* (1521) he writes, “The philosophers are of the opinion that men may obtain complete virtue by habit. On the contrary, holy scripture teaches that all things human are contaminated by sin, and are not able to be cleansed except by the Holy Spirit, which Christ earned for the human race. . . . On what authority do they [Scholastics] teach that Christian minds are raised up in the hope of salvation by human merits,

130. WABr, 1:35/17–21, translated in Ozment, *Homo spiritualis*, 184.

131. McSorley, *Luther: Right or Wrong?* 239; WA, 1:147, *conclusio secunda*.

132. LW, 31:10.

133. LW, 31:40. The bull against Luther, *Exsurge domine*, specifically condemned this thesis. See Hillerbrand, *Reformation: Narrative History*, 83.

134. LW, 51:58.

135. MSW, 39.

may rather from where does that profane name 'merit' come, by which nothing more shameful or more impious can be devised?"¹³⁶ Again, the first section of the *Loci communes* (1521) deals with "The Power of Man, Especially Free Will." Here he gives a fully developed explanation of the limitations on free will, concluding "all that stupid and godless men have written about free will (*arbitrium*) and justification by works is nothing but a Pharisaic tradition."¹³⁷ In his *Against the Furious Decree of the Parisian Theologasters* (1521), he attacks Scholasticism in the harshest terms: thanks to Parisian Scholastics, "the Gospel has been obscured, faith rendered extinct, the doctrine of works received, and instead of being a Christian people, we are a people not even of the Law, but of the morals of Aristotle."¹³⁸

In Melanchthon's metaphorical language, the ox's hoof is an instrument of oppression like the elephant's foot. But whereas the latter stands for the oppression of consciences by various laws, rites, and rituals, the ox's hoof symbolizes the clergy and the theologians who furnish the theoretical justification and the practical implementation of salvation based on meritorious works.

The Left Foot

The monster's left foot is the claw of a griffon, which stands for canonists, whose jurisprudential theories justify the papacy's financial exploitation of Germany. In this section Melanchthon focuses only on one aspect of canon law, namely, its financial impact. Here he reflects the content of Luther's *Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation* (1520), where Luther presents a detailed denunciation of the fiscal effects of canon law.¹³⁹ Luther and Melanchthon were not alone in their opposition; the holder of the chair of canon law at Wittenberg, theologian and jurist Justus Jonas, actually resigned his appointment because he came to believe that canon law "reeked of self-serving" and "betrayed biblical truth."¹⁴⁰ Many other reformers also joined the chorus of criticism—Wenceslaus Linck of Nuremberg, Wolfgang Capito of Strasbourg, and Johann Eberlin von Günzburg, for example.¹⁴¹ These attacks

136. MWA, 1:83, 85. See also MWA, 1:123–26 for some of Melanchthon's other criticisms of Scholasticism.

137. Melanchthon, *Loci communes*, 29.

138. MSW, 70. In the *Nichomachian Ethics*, bk. 2, Aristotle argues that a man becomes righteous by performing righteous deeds; see Aristotle, *Complete Works*, ed. Barnes, 2:1745.

139. For Melanchthon's role in the origins of the *Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation* see Bauer, "Luthers Aufruf an den Adel," 200–201.

140. Witte, *Law and Protestantism*, 60.

141. *Ibid.*, 61.

typically date from the early 1520s. By the 1530s, many reformers were finding that, in trying to establish a new Protestant legal system, they could utilize aspects of canon law. But in the 1520s, Luther and Melanchthon were firm in their anticanonicalism.¹⁴²

The *Corpus juris canonici* comprised the law of the medieval church. It asserted broad jurisdiction over the sacraments and thus claimed authority over many aspects of everyday life. For example, jurisdiction over the sacrament of marriage meant authority over relations between husbands and wives—their sex lives and their family lives. Jurisdiction over penance meant authority over contracts, oaths, charity, inheritance, and torts. Jurisdiction over ordination gave canon law authority to define and protect the corporate rights of the clergy.¹⁴³ These jurisdictional claims were themselves based on the papal assertion of the power of the keys. From a jurisprudential point of view, the two keys stood for the knowledge to discern God's will and the power to enforce it. Practically, these powers meant that the pope could both make and enforce canon law. The sources of the canons (or rules) were the writings of the church fathers, the decisions of church councils, and the decretals of the popes.

The *Decretum* of Gratian (ca. 1140) was one of the most influential studies of the canons; commentators on the *Decretum* are known as decretists. In addition to this work, the *Corpus juris canonici* included the *Decretalium Gregorii IX. libri quinque*, the *Liber sextus* of Boniface VIII, the *Constitutiones Clementinae* of Clement V, the *Extravagantes* of John XXII, and the *Extravagantes communes*.¹⁴⁴ Glossators on the post-Gratian decretals are known as decretalists. When Melanchthon speaks of the “canonists” he means the decretists, the decretalists, and the content of the *Corpus juris canonici* itself.¹⁴⁵

In the *Address to the Christian Nobility*, Luther denounces both the pope's jurisdictional claims over canon law and various specific financial exactions that canon law made possible. He alleges that canon law is subject to change at the whim of the pope: “Even if there were much in it that was good, it should still be destroyed, for the pope has the whole canon law imprisoned in the ‘chamber of his heart,’ so that henceforth any study of it is

142. Melanchthon, *Loci communes*, 62; *LW*, 44:141–57; *LW*, 31:383–95.

143. Witte, *Law and Protestantism*, 38.

144. Peterson, “Development of the Canon Law,” 235–38; *LW*, 39:281n34.

145. See Ullmann, *Law and Politics*, 119–89, for an excellent overview of canon law and the scholarship of canon law.

just a waste of time and a farce.”¹⁴⁶ Luther is referring to the *Scrinium pectoris* decretal of Boniface VIII, which stated, “The Roman pontiff has all laws in the chamber of his heart [*scrinium pectoris*].”¹⁴⁷ By right of this decretal, the pope claimed authority to revise canon law as he saw fit. Luther notes in sarcasm, “We could never fathom the arbitrary will of the pope, which is all that canon law has become. . . . Let there be no more ‘doctors of decrees’ [*doctores decretorum*] in the world, but only ‘doctors of the papal chamber of the heart,’ that is, popish hypocrites!”¹⁴⁸

Luther not only condemns this jurisdictional theory, he also takes to task a long list of instruments of exploitation. He begins by denouncing annates, one of the most controversial of papal exactions. Originally an income that a bishop received from vacant benefices in his diocese, annates evolved into a payment owed to the pope upon the accession of a new bishop. After 1418 the term also came to include the so-called *servitia*, which were payments bishops and abbots made to the curia at the time of their accession. The Council of Constance restricted the payment of annates to bishoprics and abbeys that had a yearly income of more than twenty-four gulden.¹⁴⁹ Protests against the collection of annates were quite common among the German clergy at the close of the Middle Ages.¹⁵⁰ In 1521, a committee of electors and princes included annates in the list of grievances (*Gravamina*) they submitted to Charles V at the Diet of Worms.¹⁵¹ As the Strasbourg preacher Jakob Wimpfeling stated in 1515, “the sums of money our prelates must send to Rome are taken from the pockets of poor burghers, rural clerics, and impoverished peasants, and many a husband and father cannot nourish his family for the taxes he must pay.”¹⁵²

Luther also protests against the papal right of reservation, the authority of the pope to assert jurisdiction over any vacant benefice. According to canon law, appointments to benefices are made either *per petitionem alterius* (upon

146. LW 44:202.

147. “Romanus pontifex iura omnia in scrinio pectoris sui censetur habere.” See PE, 2:148n2; LW, 44:202.

148. Ibid., 203. For a discussion of the jurisdictional authority of the papacy, see Ullmann, *Medieval Papalism*, 50–75.

149. The decrees relating to papal collection of annates can be found in *Extravagantes* of John XXII and the *Extravagantes communes*. See PE, 1:383n1, 2:84n1; LW, 44:144n58; ODCC, 59; and Benrath, *An den christlichen Adel*, 88–89n19. For a discussion of annates, see Lunt, *Papal Revenues*, 1:94–99, 2:315–72.

150. Strauss, *Manifestations of Discontent*, 38, 45.

151. Ibid., 54–55.

152. Ibid., 45.

election, presentation, and appointment by others), or *proprio motu* (on the pope's own motion). The Concordat of Vienna (1448) established that livings that fell vacant during the months of February, April, June, August, October, and December were to be filled *per petitionem alterius*; vacancies that happened during the months of January, March, May, July, September, and November were to be filled by papal appointments. The rules could always be modified, however, if the pope asserted that a given benefice was "reserved in the heart" of the pope (*reservatio in pectore*).¹⁵³ Luther complains that the papacy had expanded its jurisdiction over benefices by claiming (1) that if the holder of a non-papal benefice died in Rome or on his way to Rome, his living became the property of the pope; (2) that the benefices of all cardinals and of all who were members of the papal household belonged to the pope; (3) that, if the possession of a benefice was disputed in Rome, the contested living would become the property of the Roman See.¹⁵⁴

The cost of the archbishop's pallium was another source of grievance. The pallium is an ecclesiastical vestment made of white wool in the form of a circular band for the shoulders with pendants in front and back. It is the emblem of an archbishop's office; a newly elected archbishop had to secure the pallium from the pope within three months of his election. Originally, the pope granted the pallium gratis, but by the sixteenth century the fee for the pallium had become quite substantial. The *Gravamina* of 1521 claimed that the charge for a pallium had increased from 10,000 gulden to as much as 24,000 gulden.¹⁵⁵ Luther calls for an imperial law banning the securing of the pallium from Rome.

Luther also protested papal circumventions of the prohibitions against plurality of benefices and absenteeism. The granting of more than one benefice to the same person was one of the ways that the Renaissance papacy rewarded its servants. Luther alleges that the stratagems the pope used had the effect of moving benefices (and thus their income) from German to Italian clerics. For example, the pope could appoint a coadjutor-bishop to assist an old or sick individual without that person's consent. The coadjutor would then succeed to

153. LW, 44:145n61; PE, 2:86–87n3, 94–95n4.

154. LW, 44:146–48.

155. LW, 44:148, n71; PE, 2:89–90n3; Benrath, *An den christlichen Adel*, 91n22; Wrede, *Deutsche Reichstagsakten jüngere Reihe*, 675. For a discussion of the history of the pallium, see Eidenschink, *Election of Bishops*, 101–43, 147–48; Lunt, *Papal Revenues*, 1:91, 2:299.

the see when the incumbent died.¹⁵⁶ Or again, the pope might grant one of his courtiers a benefice to hold *in commendam*, which meant that, when the benefice became vacant, he could enjoy the revenues without performing any associated duties. The result was clerical absenteeism.¹⁵⁷ The pope might bundle a number of benefices into one *unio* (uniting) treating the many as one, thereby avoiding restrictions against pluralism. Luther alleges that one member of the papal court held “twenty-two parishes, seven priories, as well as forty-four benefices.”¹⁵⁸ Still another technique was to appoint a bishop as “administrator” of an abbey or another dignity. This allowed him to collect the income without actually assuming the second title.¹⁵⁹ Benefices could also be granted upon condition of regression (*regressus*). That meant that the pope retained reversionary rights; when the incumbent died, the benefice automatically reverted to Rome. A variant was to confer a benefice while reserving part of the annual income for the grantor. Luther charges that regression, in effect, makes a benefice into the pope’s hereditary property.¹⁶⁰

Finally, Luther denounces dispensations that could be had for payment of a fee: indulgences, letters of confession (which allowed the purchaser to choose his own confessor), butter letters (which alleviated the severity of fasts), and *confessionalia* (a general term for dispensations relating to penance).¹⁶¹ He ends this section of the *Address* with a forceful recapitulation:

Since the pope with his Romanist practices—his commendas, coadjutors, reservations, *gratiae expectativae*, papal months, incorporations, unions, pensions, pallia, chancery rules, and such knavery—usurps for himself all the German foundations without authority and right, and gives and sells them to foreigners at Rome who do nothing for Germany in return, and since he robs the local bishops of their rights and makes mere ciphers and dummies of them, and thereby acts contrary to his own canon law, common sense, and reason, it has finally reached the point where the livings and benefices are sold to coarse, unlettered asses and ignorant knaves at Rome out of sheer greed.¹⁶²

156. LW, 44:149; ODCC, 308.

157. LW, 44:150n78; ODCC, 319; PE, 2:91n3.

158. LW, 44:151; PE, 2:93n3.

159. LW, 44:151; a “dignity” was a church office that gave the holder jurisdiction and honorary precedence over other ecclesiastical officials, PE, 2:87n1.

160. LW, 44:152.

161. Ibid., 44:155.

162. Ibid., 44:157.

Melanchthon reflects Luther's association of canon law and avarice with the words "the canons were invented for their [servants of the pope] insatiable avarice" [377/24].

Naked Belly and Breasts

The monster's naked belly and breasts stand for clerical carnality—drunkenness, gluttony, and lust. Melanchthon cites St. Paul's phrase "lovers of pleasure more than God" (2 Timothy 3:4) [378/7] as a description of the clergy. Here he is referencing the hoary medieval tradition of anticlericalism, which the Lutheran reformers conflated with an attack on the clerical estate itself.

On the eve of the Reformation, anticlerical sentiments were quite common. For example, the anonymous reform treatise *The Reformation of the Emperor Sigismund* (ca. 1438), stated, "Many priests have lost their livings because of women. Or they are secret sodomites. All the hatred existing between priests and laymen is due to this."¹⁶³ Johann Eberlin von Günzburg, the former Franciscan turned Lutheran reformer, asserted, "When a person uses the word *pfaff* [cleric], he refers to a soulless, godless person, drunk, lazy, greedy, cantankerous and quarrelsome, rascally [*schirmig*], whoring, [and] adulterous. . . ."¹⁶⁴ The reform tract *Neu-Karsthans* (1521) stated, "it is more likely that my dapple gray horse will learn to read and write than that the clergy and bishops will go to heaven."¹⁶⁵ The grievances against the clergy were many and varied,¹⁶⁶ but Melanchthon chose to focus on the typical medieval complaints of gluttony, drunkenness, and sexual immorality. In his criticisms of the clergy, Luther addressed these same shortcomings, but he interpreted them much more broadly, insisting that physical unchastity stands for "the spiritual unchastity through which souls are perverted and defiled and led from faith to works."¹⁶⁷ He thereby combined carnality and works righteousness, condemning them together.

163. Strauss, *Manifestations of Discontent*, 14.

164. Quoted in Karant-Nunn, "Clerical Anticlericalism?"

165. Goertz, *Pfaffenhaß*, 59.

166. The different social classes had different anticlerical grievances. Peasants resented ecclesiastical tithes and rents; craftsmen disliked competition from monastic craft production; townsmen resented clerical exemption from taxes and other civic responsibilities and juridical benefit of clergy; and the imperial estates opposed the flow of money to Rome facilitated by the ecclesiastical hierarchy. See Goertz, *Pfaffenhaß*, 58; Goertz, "What a tangled and tenuous mess," 503.

167. *LW*, 39:263.

Professor Hans-Jürgen Goertz has pointed out that medieval anticlericalism addressed particular grievances whereas Reformation anticlericalism attacked the dominant position of the clerical estate.¹⁶⁸ Luther treated anticlerical topics in several treatises but the work that best illustrates his attack on the clerical estate and thus provides the best context for understanding the “Belly and Breasts” paragraph is his *Against the Spiritual Estate of the Pope and Bishops Falsely So-Called* (1522).¹⁶⁹ Here Luther addresses the bishops of the church, but he generalizes his comments to other members of the clergy as well, making specific references to religious foundations, monasteries, and universities.¹⁷⁰ He condemns the concupiscence of the prelates, accusing them of living in lust and depending on the sweat and labor of others.¹⁷¹ He characterizes the bishops as “lovers of self, lovers of money, . . . lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.”¹⁷² In fact, he uses exactly the same scriptural reference as Melancthon, 2 Timothy 3:1–5. Melancthon says the clergy brazenly live the good life [378/4]; Luther says “the bishops and all the clerics . . . count it a pleasure to revel in having a good time now.” He describes them as “reveling in their dissipation,” and as having “eyes full of adultery” and “hearts trained in greed.”¹⁷³

In addressing clerical sexual immorality, Luther lays much of the blame on the requirement of clerical celibacy: “[N]ature does not cease to do its work when there is involuntary chastity. The flesh goes on creating seed just as God created it to do. The blood vessels function according to their own nature, and thus the fluids rise—and with them the secret sin which St. Paul calls impurity and softness [Gal. 5:19]. To put it bluntly for the sake of those who suffer miserably: if it does not flow into flesh it will flow into the shirt.”¹⁷⁴

While Luther has a candid and realistic assessment of the imperative of the human sex drive, he does not condone sexual immorality. Rather, he interprets clerical licentiousness in the context of his theology of solifidianism. He treats sexual immorality as a symbol of spiritual unchastity, by which

168. Goertz, “What a tangled and tenuous mess,” 517; Goertz, *Pfaffenhaß*, 84–90; Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk*, 48; Dipple, *Antifraternalism and Anticlericalism*, 11.

169. LW, 39:247–99; WA, 10.2:105–58. Luther’s other important anticlerical works include *The Misuse of the Mass* (1522), in LW, 36:133–230, esp. 199–230, and WA, 8:482–563; and *A Faithful Admonition to All Christians to Be on Guard against Riot and Rebellion* (1522), in LW, 45:57–74, and WA, 8:676–87.

170. LW, 39:258–60.

171. Ibid., 39:253.

172. Ibid., 39:256.

173. Ibid., 39:258.

174. Ibid., 297–98.

he means the teaching of salvation by works.¹⁷⁵ He makes his point through an extended explication of the story of King Balak and the prophet Balaam (Num. 22:2–24:25, 31:16).

The story of Balaam is confusing because the protagonist appears in two different roles. First he is the prophet who, though not an Israelite, is able to be the mouthpiece of God; he steadfastly refuses Balak's request to curse the Israelites. But a few chapters later (Num. 31:16), Balaam is an evil seducer who counsels the Israelites to trespass against the Lord. It appears that either there are two Balaams whose stories are conflated or the first Balaam fell from grace, though this part of the story is omitted.¹⁷⁶

Luther's explication focuses on Numbers 31:16 and, in keeping with the theme of concupiscence, is highly sexualized. In Luther's version of events, the "counsel of Balaam" was the advice that King Balak set up an idol of Baal-Peor and surround it with beautiful women to seduce the Israelites. Luther contends that the idol of Baal-Peor was a Canaanite version of the Greek fertility god Priapus, represented as a young man with a large, exposed, permanent erection. Citing St. Augustine, Luther relates that the worship of Priapus required that women place a wreath "on the abomination and unchastity of this statue," and that brides "place themselves upon this shameful unchastity."¹⁷⁷ (Augustine relates, "the new bride was bidden to sit on the tool of Priapus."¹⁷⁸) Luther comments, "there is nothing that can be thought up which is so shameful that people cannot be persuaded to do it." He continues, "We do the same thing. Everything the miserable pope and the accursed children, our bishops, invent and present, we accept and fall for."¹⁷⁹ Citing Numbers 25:1–2, Luther contends that the worship of Baal-Peor involved eating, drinking, and being unchaste.¹⁸⁰ Luther concludes, "Therefore, this physical unchastity of Baal-Peor cannot mean anything but the spiritual unchastity through which souls are perverted and defiled and led from faith to works. . . . Spiritually, therefore, this idol is nothing but the holy canon law, the teaching of the pope and papists in Christendom. For it is a shameless portrait of spiritual unchastity. From it souls

175. Ibid., 263.

176. *Interpreter's Bible*, 2:250.

177. *LW*, 39:261.

178. Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Bettenson, bk. 7, chap. 24, 285.

179. *LW*, 39:261.

180. Ibid., 39:263. Note the similarity in language between Luther and Melancthon's *The Pope-Ass Explained* at 378/3 (see appendix).

learn to build upon works, and it perverts the virginal chastity of the pure Christian faith. Thus one should really call the pope not 'pope' but 'Priapus,' and the papists not 'papists' but 'Priapists.'"¹⁸¹

As Luther's *Against the Spiritual Estate* . . . makes clear, the reformers placed their criticisms of clerical immorality in the doctrinal context of justification by faith and the universal priesthood of believers. Within these doctrines, the clergy are no longer the mediators of salvation for the laity and they no longer deserve to hold a preeminent position within the social hierarchy.

The Fish Scales

The fish scales on the monster's arms, legs, and neck stand for secular princes and lords [378/9–10]. To place this metaphor in its historical context one must understand (1) the place of the nobility within the body politic of the Holy Roman Empire, (2) the opposition of Catholic princes to Luther's ideas and followers during the course of 1522, and (3) Luther's response to this opposition in his tract *Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed* (completed December 25, 1522).¹⁸² During the two decades from 1523 to 1543, the so-called princely Reformation took place, in which numerous princes opted to institutionalize reform doctrines and practices in their territories.¹⁸³ But in 1522 it was not clear that Luther's teachings would withstand the efforts to ban his ideas and enforce the Edict of Worms. Though by no means the only locus of power within the empire, the German nobility comprised the most important group within the polity of early modern Germany.¹⁸⁴

The members of the nobility exercised political power within a federal system of government that recognized their authority at the local territorial level, within the imperial diet, and in a newly formed executive entity known as the Imperial Council of Regency (Reichsregiment).¹⁸⁵ Melanchthon's term

181. Ibid., 39:263–64.

182. For dating of this tract see *LW*, 45:80.

183. See Cameron, *European Reformation*, 269, for a list of princes who introduced the Reformation from 1523 to 1564.

184. Benecke, *Society and Politics in Germany*, 15.

185. The Imperial Council of Regency (Reichsregiment), first formed in 1500, was brought back into existence in 1521. Its purpose was to provide a locus of executive authority in the Holy Roman Empire during the emperor's absence. Chaired by the emperor's delegate, it consisted of the electors (or their representatives) as well as delegates chosen from the other estates. In the long run, it proved unsuccessful, but in 1522 it appeared as though it might become an important and viable center of political authority. Holborn, *History of Modern Germany*, 44–48; Ranke, *History of the Reformation in Germany*, 1:226–28; Laffan, "Empire under Maximilian I," 208.

“secular princes and lords” included an imposing list of noble titles: electors, dukes, margraves, landgraves, counts, lords, princes, and imperial knights. These secular lords, together with their ecclesiastical counterparts and the free imperial cities, made up no fewer than 364 relatively autonomous jurisdictions within the empire. They were able to govern their separate territories in relative independence, providing defense, administering justice, and sustaining the church.

By the beginning of the sixteenth century, the imperial diet consisted of three chambers: the Electors (the archbishops of Mainz, Trier, and Cologne, the count palatine of the Rhine, the elector of Saxony, and the elector of Brandenburg); the Council of Ruling Princes (ecclesiastical and lay rulers below the rank of elector); and the Chamber of Free and Imperial Cities.¹⁸⁶ One scholar has summarized the jurisdictional composition of the empire as follows: seven electors, eighty ruling princes (thirty of whom were laymen), 150 ruling counts and lords, about two thousand imperial knights, and sixty-six free imperial cities.¹⁸⁷ Within this complex governance by estates, the “secular princes and lords” comprised a very influential fraction.

In 1522 it was unclear whether the secular nobles would side with the emperor and help enforce the Edict of Worms, or side with Luther and help spread the Reformation. What was clear, however, was that Luther had some powerful princely opponents who issued religious decrees in an effort to eliminate the spread of his ideas and ban his supporters from their territories. This princely opposition provides an important part of the background for the “fish scales” section of Melancthon’s *The Pope-Ass Explained*.

The first of the anti-Lutheran religious mandates came from Duke Henry II, the Younger, Duke of Braunschweig-Lüneburg and Prince of Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel (ruled 1514–68). On January 12, 1522, this stalwart defender of Catholicism issued a decree forbidding his subjects to create any sects, alliances, or unions that opposed the traditional teachings of the “holy church” or that might lead to popular disturbance. He threatened violators with torture and severe punishment.¹⁸⁸

186. The king of Bohemia, who was a seventh elector, was not a member of the diet. Note that the lowest group of nobles, the imperial knights, did not win separate representation at the diet.

187. Benecke, *Society and Politics*, 116; Ramsay, “Austrian Hapsburgs and the Empire,” 327–28; Hay, *Europe in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*, 187–203.

188. St.L., 15:2199–2200.

Shortly thereafter, on January 20, the Imperial Council of Regency condemned religious innovations such as Communion in both kinds, clerical marriage, and the discarding of vestments, and urged secular and ecclesiastical authorities to impose severe penalties against those who dared violate these prohibitions.¹⁸⁹ Luther took bitter and sarcastic exception to this decree in his tract *Receiving Both Kinds in the Sacrament* (1522).¹⁹⁰

On February 10, 1522, Luther's earliest and most vocal princely detractor, Duke George the Bearded, Duke of Albertine Saxony and Margrave of Meissen (ruled 1500–39), issued his own religious mandate. In it he condemned monks who had abandoned their habits and tonsures, preached against the traditional mass, celebrated communion in both kinds, told people that they need not receive the Eucharist on an empty stomach, and consecrated the sacrament using the German language and wearing secular clothing. He also condemned the clergy who had taken wives. He made specific reference to the edict of the Imperial Council of Regency, and he ordered that renegade monks and secular clergy who had become followers of Luther were to be arrested and detained until he could impose proper punishment.¹⁹¹

The next princes to prohibit Luther's followers were the Bavarian coregents Duke William IV (ruled 1511–50) and Duke Louis X (ruled 1514–45). In February Luther's nemesis from the Leipzig Debate, Johann Eck of the University of Ingolstadt, urged the dukes to issue a decree against Luther and in support of the Edict of Worms. On March 5, 1522, that decree was forthcoming. In it the dukes stated, "We therefore order all Our subjects to reject each and all of those articles of the Lutheran creed which have been or will be condemned, and not to engage in disputations over any such article. We further instruct all Our officials to be vigilant in their respective districts, and to take into custody every person, of whatever estate he may be, who is suspected of association with the Lutheran heresy. He is to be held until We ourselves, having been apprised, can make disposition of the case."¹⁹²

Archduke Ferdinand I of Austria (ruled 1521–64) was yet another princely opponent of the Lutheran movement. Serving as the representative

189. Gess, *Akten und Briefe*, 1:250–52; LW, 45:77–78; St.L., 15:2194–96; Wrede, *Deutsche Reichstagsakten jüngere Reihe*, 3:21–23.

190. LW, 36:246.

191. Gess, *Akten und Briefe*, 1:269–71; St.L., 15:2197–99; Luther, *Correspondence*, ed. Smith and Jacobs, 2:86–89. See also Welck, *Georg der Bärtige*, 79; Becker, "Herzog Georg von Sachsen," 171–73.

192. Strauss, "Religious Policies of Dukes Wilhelm IV and Ludwig X," 355. See also Riezler, *Geschichte Baierns*, 4:79–80.

of his brother, Charles V, to the Imperial Council of Regency, Ferdinand was under great pressure from the emperor to take steps to enforce the Edict of Worms and to do everything in his power to uproot the Lutheran heresy.¹⁹³ Nevertheless, Ferdinand failed to convince the imperial diet to endorse strict enforcement of the Edict of Worms. As already noted, the Imperial Council of Regency, which he chaired, did issue a directive against religious innovations. For his own part, in November 1522, Archduke Ferdinand issued mandates to Austrian officials directing that they no longer tolerate Lutheran preaching and that they order printers and book dealers to neither print nor sell Lutheran books.¹⁹⁴

During the summer of 1522, Luther also came under criticism from a foreign prince, namely, the king of England, Henry VIII. Seeking to refute Luther's *Babylonian Captivity of the Church* and to gain papal favor, Henry wrote a Latin treatise, *Assertio septem sacramentorum* (*Assertion of the Seven Sacraments*). Henry had his book formally presented to Leo X, who in turn conferred on Henry the style "Defender of the Faith."¹⁹⁵ Duke George encouraged his secretary and chaplain, Hieronymus Emser, to make a German translation of Henry's tract.¹⁹⁶ Luther responded in both Latin and German with *Against Henry, King of England*, in part, hoping to counter the impact of Emser's translation within Ducal Saxony.¹⁹⁷ Henry's arguments and Luther's counterarguments need not concern us. The point is that a prominent secular prince, the king of England, championed the pope and condemned Luther in 1522. Henry wrote, "I wish the author [Luther] may repent, be converted, and live; and . . . correct his books, filled with malice, and revoke his errors. If Luther refuses this, it will shortly come to pass, if Christian princes do their duty, that these errors, and himself, if he perseveres therein, may be burned in the fire."¹⁹⁸ Henry had already taken steps against Luther's works in England. On May 12, 1521, Cardinal Wolsey formally announced the excommunication of Luther and his followers and presided over a ceremonial burning of

193. Fichtner, *Ferdinand I of Austria*, 35–36.

194. Loserth, *Die Reformation und Gegenreformation*, 23, 23n1. See also Lhotsky, *Das Zeitalter des Hauses Österreich*, 162.

195. Tjernagel, *Henry VIII and the Lutherans*, 10.

196. WABr 2:565/16–17, 566n7.

197. Brecht, *Martin Luther, 1521–1531*, 85.

198. Henry VIII, *Assertio septem sacramentorum*, ed. O'Donovan, 134; Tjernagel, *Henry VIII and the Lutherans*, 12.

Luther's works. He then sent orders to the bishops of England to confiscate all of Luther's writings and send them to him.¹⁹⁹

One final decree, issued at the end of the year, completes the chronology of princely censures in 1522. Luther published his German translation of the New Testament in September 1522, basing it on Erasmus's Greek New Testament. The work contained woodcut illustrations of the Revelation of St. John that had a strong antipapal slant. Duke George took action almost immediately. On November 7, 1522, he issued a proclamation against Luther's New Testament, directing his subjects to surrender their copies to the duke's representatives and promising that they would receive compensation for the purchase price. Subjects were given until Christmas to comply; thereafter, offenders would be punished.²⁰⁰

Thus, by the end of 1522, the Lutheran reform movement faced noble opposition from many quarters. The imperial diet had condemned it in the Edict of Worms, the Imperial Council of Regency had forbidden Lutheran religious innovations, and several Catholic princes had promulgated religious mandates against Luther's followers. In the face of these sanctions, Luther crafted his *Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed*, composed between October and December 1522.²⁰¹

In this treatise, Luther argues that secular authorities are established by God to restrain those who would do evil. They do not derive their power from the pope, as Pope Boniface VIII had interpreted the medieval theory of two swords. Also, these temporal rulers have no power over faith or conscience. Luther thus separates church and state, and defends the importance of the judgment of the individual in opposing secular authorities.²⁰² *Temporal Authority* presents the kernel of Luther's "two-kingdoms" theory, which he elaborated in a number of other writings.²⁰³

199. Tjernagel, *Henry VIII and the Lutherans*, 6–7.

200. Gess, *Akten und Briefe*, 1:386–87; *LW*, 45:84n11; Becker, "Herzog Georg als Schriftsteller," 179.

201. Luther was invited to preach a series of six sermons at Weimar on October 19 and October 24–26. The third and fourth of these homilies contain a summary of the content of *Temporal Authority*. See *WA*, 10.3:371–85. The Imperial Council of Regency and the Second Diet of Nuremberg continued to discuss the enforcement of the Edict of Worms into the spring of 1523. For details, see *LW*, 49:35–39. In a letter to Elector Frederick dated May 29, 1523, Luther reveals detailed knowledge of the actions of the diet. These events occurred either at the same time as or possibly after the writing of the pope-ass pamphlet and are therefore not included in this discussion.

202. *LW*, 45:77–129.

203. Witte, *Law and Protestantism*, 87–117; Thompson, *Political Thought of Martin Luther*, 36–61.

With reference to the pope-ass pamphlet, *Temporal Authority* is important because it criticizes the Catholic princes in the same way as Melanchthon and it uses the same metaphor of fish scales to characterize the secular princes. Both Melanchthon and Luther derived this metaphor from the Old Testament description of the leviathan, Job 41:6–8: “His body is like molten shields, shut close up with scales pressing upon one another. One is joined to another, and not so much as any air can come between them: They stick one to another and they hold one another fast, and shall not be separated.”

In using this metaphor, Luther and Melanchthon follow a medieval commonplace for describing the Antichrist. As noted in chapter 3, both Matthew of Janov and the author of the *Anatomia Antichristi* depicted the body of the Antichrist as being covered with scales, citing this same passage in Job.²⁰⁴ Luther writes, “since I have not been in terror of their [the ‘ungracious lords and angry nobles’] idol, the pope, who threatens to deprive me of soul and heaven, I must show that I am not in terror of his lackeys [*Schupen*, i.e., scales] and bullies [*Wasserblassen*, i.e., water bubbles] who threaten to deprive me of body and of earth.”²⁰⁵ *Luther’s Works* translates *Schupen* as “lackeys,” which is correct in context, but which obscures the reference to “scales” in Job. In German and in the context of medieval antichristology, it is clear that Luther is calling the “ungracious lords and angry nobles” the “scales” of the papal Antichrist, his “lackeys.” The word *Wasserblassen* literally means “water bubbles,” “bladders,” or “blisters.” It was Luther’s favorite derogatory sobriquet for Duke George.²⁰⁶

In part 2 of *Temporal Authority*, Luther makes specific reference to the Catholic princes who have banned his works from their territories: “In Meissen, Bavaria, the Mark, and other places, the tyrants have issued an order that all copies of the New Testament are everywhere to be turned in to the officials.”²⁰⁷ Here Luther refers to the religious policies of Duke George, the Margrave of Meissen; Duke William IV of Bavaria; and Elector Joachim I of Brandenburg (ruled 1499–1535).²⁰⁸ Luther sums up his response to the opposition of the Catholic princes and lords as follows:

204. Matthew of Janov, *Regulae*, ed. Kybal, 3:69; *De Antichristo & membrorum ejus anatomia*, 456.

205. *LW*, 45:85.

206. *Ibid.*, 45:84–85.

207. *Ibid.*, 45:112.

208. Elector Joachim supported the issuing of the Edict of Worms and backed Archduke Ferdinand in his efforts to get the imperial diet to condemn Luther. In a letter to the Imperial Council of Regency dated

If your prince or temporal ruler commands you to side with the pope, to believe thus and so, or to get rid of certain books, you should say, "It is not fitting that Lucifer should sit at the side of God. Gracious sir, I owe you obedience in body and property, command me within the limits of your authority on earth, and I will obey. But if you command me to believe or to get rid of certain books, I will not obey; for then you are a tyrant and overreach yourself, commanding where you have neither the right nor the authority."²⁰⁹

When Melanchthon refers to "secular princes and lords" as fish scales that "have always depended upon and still depend upon the pope and his rule," he is speaking in general terms about the late medieval nexus of feudal and ecclesiastical authority. But he is also making a specific reference to the religious policies of the princely defenders of Catholicism in 1522, to Luther's *Temporal Authority* treatise, and to the servants of the papal Antichrist.

The Old Man's Head on the Backside

The face on the monster's rump stands for the peaceful demise of the papacy—"that it grows old and perishes by itself, without use of sword or human hands, as Daniel 8[:25] has said, 'he . . . shall be broken without hands'" [378/32–34]. While Melanchthon's interpretation of the rump face as a symbol of nonviolent change seems far-fetched, it relates directly to Luther's treatise *A Sincere Admonition by Martin Luther to All Christians to Guard Against Insurrection and Rebellion*. Thus, in order to understand Melanchthon's plea for nonviolence, it is necessary to look at the context and content of this pamphlet.

Professor Hans-Jürgen Goertz has argued that Luther wrote his *Sincere Admonition* in order to "cool down the anticlerical anger that he himself had heated up."²¹⁰ Known for his forceful, direct, and sometimes intemperate language, Luther's writings from the early 1520s included numerous provocative passages. For example, in *The Misuse of the Mass* (written in both Latin and German, November 1521; published 1522), he derided the clergy as the devil's priests with "anointed and oiled fingers, . . . tonsured head and . . . pharisaical dress."²¹¹ In his *Against the Spiritual Estate of the Pope* (published before July

March 17, 1522, he indicated his support for the council's January 20, 1522, mandate against the Lutherans, see Wrede, *Deutsche Reichstagsakten jüngere Reihe*, 3:22–23, esp. 23n1.

209. LW, 45:111–12.

210. Goertz, "What a tangled and tenuous mess," 500.

211. LW, 36:160.

1522), he wrote, "It would be better to kill all bishops and to annihilate all religious foundations and monasteries than to let a single soul perish. . . . [I]f they [the bishops] refuse to hear God's word and rather rage and rave with banning, burning, killing, and all evil, what could be better for them than to encounter a strong rebellion which exterminates them from the world?"²¹² Possibly Luther's most violent prose is to be found in his Latin *Comment on Prierias' Epitoma responsionis ad Martinum Lutherum* (June 1520), where he wrote,

If we punish thieves with gallows, robbers with the sword, and heretics with fire, why do we not turn with force of arms against these teachers of iniquity, these cardinals, these popes, and this whole collection of filth of the Roman Sodom which unceasingly lays waste the church? Why do we not wash our hands in their blood, so that we and all who are ours can be free from a general conflagration that will be extremely dangerous for everyone?²¹³

Granted that the audience for this work was the educated, Latin-reading public, the language is still highly inflammatory. Luther did not abandon his anticlerical stance, but he nevertheless decided to write an exhortation to nonviolent change after his secret, incognito journey from the Wartburg to Wittenberg in December 1521. Instances of popular unrest in Wittenberg may have helped move him to this project, but it seems that he was primarily motivated by conversations he overheard as he traveled across the countryside.

While Luther was in hiding at the Wartburg, several anticlerical disturbances took place in Wittenberg. On October 5 and 6, a group of students harassed a delegate from the Hospital Brothers of St. Anthony.²¹⁴ On December 3 a mob of students and townspeople, armed with knives, accosted the priests who were celebrating mass in the parish church, driving them away from the altar and confiscating the mass books.²¹⁵ The city council wrote the Elector of Saxony, warning him that many of its citizens wanted to join together in a riot.²¹⁶ The next day, December 4, a mob of students broke into the Franciscan

212. LW, 39:253.

213. WA, 6:347/22–27, translated in Brecht, *Martin Luther 1483–1521*, 347; St.L., 18:452.

214. LW, 45:54, 48:327.

215. Müller, *Die Wittenberger Bewegung*, 73.

216. Ibid., 74. See also LW, 45:55.

monastery and verbally abused the friars.²¹⁷ Fearing that matters were getting out of control, the council posted guards to protect the cloister.²¹⁸

Luther arrived in Wittenberg on December 4, 1521, having traveled from the Wartburg via Leipzig disguised as a knight. He remained in Wittenberg for three days and thus had an opportunity to hear reports of and even witness some of these anticlerical actions firsthand. But he seems to have been much more concerned about conversations he overheard during his travels. While still in Wittenberg, he wrote to Spalatin, "I was disturbed on the way by various rumors concerning the improper conduct of some of our people, and [therefore] I have decided to issue a public exhortation on that subject as soon as I have returned to my wilderness [i.e., the Wartburg]."²¹⁹

The promised exhortation took the form of the tract *A Sincere Admonition* (completed in mid-December 1521, published early in 1522). In this work, Luther bases his argument on Daniel 8:25, the same scriptural passage that Melanchthon cites [378/33]. Luther writes, "Scripture foretells for the pope and his adherents an end far worse than insurrection and bodily death. Daniel 8[:25] says, 'By no human hand he shall be broken,' that is, by no sword or physical force."²²⁰ The lies of the pope and his clerical hierocracy need only be exposed and they will be undone by the world's derision. "All that the pope is and has, his foundations, monasteries, universities, laws and doctrines are mere lies, founded on nothing but lies. . . . It only needs to be recognized and made known, therefore, and pope, priests, and monks will end in shame and disgrace."²²¹

Luther contends that insurrection is to be avoided for a number of reasons: (1) it substitutes human punishment for divine retribution, (2) it lacks discernment, often harming the innocent more than the guilty, (3) it is forbidden by God, who says, "Revenge is mine, and I will repay" (Deut. 32:35), and (4) it is a suggestion of the devil who does not want the bright light of truth to expose the pope and the papists.²²² If people would stop becoming priests, monks, and nuns, stop giving money for bulls, candles, bells, and churches, and simply live lives of faith and love, the "pope, bishops, cardinals, priests,

217. Müller, *Die Wittenberger Bewegung*, 77–78.

218. *Ibid.*, 78.

219. *LW*, 48:351–52.

220. *Ibid.*, 45:59.

221. *Ibid.*, 45:60.

222. *Ibid.*, 45:62–64.

monks, nuns, bells, towers, masses, vigils, cowls, hoods, tonsures, monastic rules, statutes, and all the swarming vermin of the papal regime . . . will all vanish like smoke.”²²³

Luther’s strident language seems inconsistent with his peaceful message. But his point is that verbal criticism will bring the pope into disrepute and undermine his standing. “When he [the pope] is gone from men’s hearts and so has lost their confidence, he is already destroyed. He can be handled better this way than with a hundred insurrections. By resort to violence we will do him no harm at all.”²²⁴ The papal regime must be slain with words not deeds. Luther thus yokes together a forceful condemnation of the papal clergy with a forceful condemnation of anticlerical violence.²²⁵ Melanchthon makes the same point: the truth exposes the malice of the papal regime and it “perishes by itself, without the use of the sword or human hands” [378/32–33].

The Tail

In construing the monster’s tail, Melanchthon conflates two medieval iconographic commonplaces—the tail as false prophet and the dragon as persecutor of the people of God. The false prophet topos derives from Isaiah 9:15: “and the prophet that teacheth lies, he is the tail.” The persecuting dragon comes from Revelation 12 and 13, where it is described as speaking blasphemies against God and making war against the saints (Rev. 13:6–7). The *Anatomia Antichristi* made use of both of these images. For example, the author described the Antichrist’s tail as false prophets who stir up the flies of twisted thoughts, which separate Christians from God. He also spoke of the tail of the dragon in Revelation 12:4 “[that] drew the third part of the stars of heaven and cast them to earth.”²²⁶ This he interpreted as false prophets seducing mankind. For Melanchthon, the Antichrist’s tail takes the form of a dragon’s head that spews papal bulls and pro-papal books.

Between the posting of the Ninety-Five Theses and the publication of the pope-ass pamphlet, several papal bulls attempted to deal with the Luther question. On November 9, 1518, Pope Leo X issued *Cum postquam*, which defined the church’s teaching on indulgences and reaffirmed contemporary practice by asserting the pope’s authority to distribute indulgences for the

223. Ibid., 45:68.

224. Ibid., 45:67.

225. See Goertz, “What a tangled and tenuous mess,” 514.

226. *De Antichristo & memborum ejus anatomia*, 456–57.

benefit of both the living and the dead in purgatory.²²⁷ In a letter to Elector Frederick, Luther complained that *Cum postquam* offered nothing new, used confusing and incomprehensible language, and cited neither scripture, church fathers, nor canon law in support of its points. He concluded, it “offers only empty words which do not deal with my problem, nor does it reply in any way to my writings or requests.”²²⁸ On June 15, 1520, Pope Leo issued *Exsurge domine*, which condemned forty-one propositions drawn from Luther’s works, required that his heretical writings be burned, and threatened Luther with excommunication if he did not recant within sixty days following the bull’s formal promulgation in Saxony.²²⁹ Luther received the bull on October 10, 1520, and sixty days later, he burned a copy of it in a bonfire outside the Elster Gate in Wittenberg, symbolically marking his formal break with Rome.²³⁰ Within a month of the famous bonfire, Leo issued *Decet romanum pontificem* (January 3, 1521), formally excommunicating Luther. It declared him and his supporters heretics and called for the formal proclamation of the excommunication in all churches.²³¹ On March 28, 1521, the pope issued his traditional Maundy Thursday bull, *In coena domini*, a customary annual condemnation of heretics. This year he included Luther for the first time. In 1522, Luther translated this bull into German as a New Year’s “gift” to the pope.²³²

Turning to the “slandorous books” that the dragon spews forth, we come to a consideration of the Catholic controversialists and their works from the period 1517 to 1522.²³³ The men who, early on, took up the challenge of defending the papal regime and the ecclesiastical status quo against the criticisms of Luther and his supporters represented a broad spectrum of theologians and regular and secular clergy drawn primarily from Germany and Italy,

227. *Cum postquam* was officially published December 13, 1518. For the text, see Kidd, *Documents Illustrative of the Continental Reformation*, 39–40. See also Hendrix, *Luther and the Papacy*, 76–77; Brecht, *Martin Luther, 1483–1521*, 261.

228. LW, 48:105.

229. Kidd, *Documents Illustrative of the Continental Reformation*, 74–79; Hillerbrand, *Reformation: Narrative History*, 80–84.

230. Luther explained his actions in *Why the Books of the Pope and His Disciples Were Burned* (1520), in LW, 31:381–95.

231. Mirbt and Aland, *Quellen zur Geschichte des Papsttums*, 1:513–15; Brecht, *Martin Luther, 1483–1521*, 427.

232. WA, 8:688–720; PE, 2:105n4.

233. In German, the Catholic controversialists are known as the “katholische Kontroverstheologen”; Luther called them “Romanists” or “papists.” The best recent discussion of them is by Bagchi, *Luther’s Earliest Opponents*. See also Edwards, “Catholic Controversial Literature, 1518–1555.”

as well as two secular princes. The Germans included Johann Tetzel (1465–1519), Dominican preacher, inquisitor, and indulgence seller; Johann Eck (1486–1543), doctor of theology, professor of theology at Ingolstadt, ordained priest, and accomplished debater; Augustin von Alveldt (ca. 1480–ca. 1532), Franciscan Observant and lecturer in theology at the university in Leipzig; Thomas Murner (1475–1537), Franciscan, humanist, doctor of both theology and law, imperial poet laureate, and master of satire; Johann Dobneck, known as Cochlaeus (1479–1552), humanist, doctor of theology, ordained priest, and master of the St. Lawrence school in Nuremberg; and Hieronymus Emser (1477–1527), bachelor of theology, master of arts, licentiate of canon law, secretary and court chaplain to Duke George of Saxony. Of these, the most prolific during the period from 1518 to 1522 were Eck, Alveldt, and Emser.²³⁴

Some of the most important Italian controversialists during these same years included Sylvester Mazzolini Prierias (1456–1527), Dominican, theologian, canon lawyer, and master of the sacred palace for Leo X; Thomas de Vio, known as Cajetan (1469–1534), master-general of the Dominican order (1508–18), cardinal, master of sacred theology, papal diplomat, and strong proponent of papal supremacy; and Thomas Rhadinus Todiscus (1488–1527), Dominican, student of philosophy and theology, and vicar to Prierias as master of the sacred palace.

In addition to the German and Italian theologians, there were two ruling princes who joined the fray: King Henry VIII of England and Duke George of Saxony.²³⁵ Both were reasonably well grounded in theology and both used their positions of political authority to take steps against the spread of Lutheran ideas.

As one might expect, the publication record of the Catholic controversialists responded to key developments of the reform movement itself, beginning with the Indulgence Controversy.²³⁶ The papal court's first official response to Luther's Ninety-Five Theses was Prierias's Latin treatise *Dialogue Concerning the Power of the Pope against the Presumptuous Positions of Martin*

234. Bagchi, *Luther's Earliest Opponents*, 189. Note that Cochlaeus was also very prolific, but most of his polemical works date from after 1522.

235. Duke George's most important works come after 1522 and are therefore not considered here. See Becker, "Herzog Georg als Schriftsteller," 183–269.

236. David V. N. Bagchi uses the approach of surveying the early controversialist corpus from the perspective of key developments of the Reformation movement itself. See Bagchi, *Luther's Earliest Opponents*, 10–146.

Luther (1518).²³⁷ That same year Johann Tetzel published *Rebuttal of a Presumptuous Sermon Containing Twenty Erroneous Articles on Papal Indulgence and Grace*.²³⁸ The agenda of the reform movement soon shifted from the theology of indulgences to the ideology of papal supremacy. As part of the preliminary skirmishing prior to the Leipzig Disputation, Luther proposed a set of thirteen theses, the most controversial of which was thesis thirteen, which questioned papal powers. He expanded on this topic in his *Explanation of the Thirteenth Thesis on the Authority of the Pope*. Prierias responded to this with his *Martin Luther's Erroneous Arguments Named, Exposed, Rejected, and Most Utterly Ground to Pieces* (1520).²³⁹ Alveltdt also answered Luther with his *The Apostolic See* (1520)²⁴⁰ and his vernacular *A Very Fruitful and Useful Little Book Concerning the Holy See* (1520).²⁴¹ Thomas Murner joined in with *Concerning the Papacy* (1520),²⁴² as did also Johann Eck with a three-volume work entitled *The Primacy of Peter against Luther* (1521).²⁴³

The Leipzig Debate occasioned yet another wave of controversialist publications. Hieronymus Emser, for example, published an account of the debate in the form of an open letter to the administrator of the Catholic church in Prague entitled *The Leipzig Disputation: Did It Support the Bohemians?* (1519), wherein he falsely reported that Luther had not supported the Hussite position.²⁴⁴ Eck also took part with his *Vindication of Eck against Those Things Which the Wittenberg Grammarian, Philip Melancthon, Falsely Asserted Concerning the Leipzig Disputation* (1519).²⁴⁵

The year after the Leipzig Debate, Luther published some of his most influential works, including *The Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*. This call to the secular authorities to carry out a radical reform

237. Sylvestri Prieratis O. P. in praesumptuosas Martini Lutheri conclusiones de potestate Papae dialogus. For locations of works cited in notes 237–51, see Bagchi, *Luther's Earliest Opponents*, 269–83.

238. Vorlegung gemacht wyder eynen vormessen sermon von twentzig irrigen artikeln bestliche ablas und gnade belangende, allen christglaubigen menschen tzu wissen von nothen.

239. Errata et argumenta Martini Luteris recitata, detecta, repulsa et copiosissima trita.

240. Super apostolica sede, an videlicet divino sit iure nec ne, anque pontifex qui Papa dici caeptus est, iure divino in ea ipsa praesideat, non parum laudanda ex sacro Biblitorum canone declaratur.

241. Eyn gar fruchtbar und nutzbarlich buchleyn von dem Babstlichen stul: und von sant Peter: und von den / warhafftigen scheflein Christi sein / die Christus unser herr Petro befolen hat in sein hute und regirung.

242. Von dem babstentum, das ist von der höchsten Obrigkeit des christlichen Glaubens.

243. De primatu Petri adversus Lutherum libri tres.

244. De disputatione Lipsicensi, quantum ad Boemos obiter deflexa est.

245. Excusatio Eckii ad ea, quae falso sibi Phil. Melancthon Grammaticus Wittenb. super Theologica Disputatione Lipsica adscripsit.

of the ecclesiastical establishment elicited numerous responses: Eck published *Defense of the Sacred Council of Constance, Holy Christendom, His Imperial Highness Sigmund, and the German Nobility* (1520);²⁴⁶ Thomas Murner brought out *To the Exalted Illustrious Nobility of the German Nation that They Protect the Christian Faith against the Destroyer of the Christian Faith, Martin Luther . . .* (1520);²⁴⁷ and Emser issued *Against the Unchristian Book of the Augustinian Martin Luther to the German Nobility* (1521).²⁴⁸ The Italian Thomas Rhadinus, who used his byname Tedeschi to announce his German heritage, wrote his *Oration of Thomas Rhadinus against the Heretic Martin Luther* (1520).²⁴⁹

Even more controversial than *Address to the Christian Nobility* was *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, for the latter called into question the validity of the sacraments of the church. It galvanized numerous controversialists into action. For example, Alveldt wrote *A Sermon in Which Brother Augustinus von Alveldt . . . Complains . . . of Brother Martin Luther . . . Together with an Addendum about Recent Writings of Brother Martin Luther Concerning the Mass* (1520?).²⁵⁰ Murner produced *A Christian and Brotherly Exhortation to the Learned Doctor Martin Luther of the Augustinian Order at Wittenberg* (1520),²⁵¹ and King Henry VIII wrote his *Assertion of the Seven Sacraments* (1521).²⁵²

These are only a few of the many Catholic responses to Luther during the years 1517 to 1522. Most of these works reasserted the authority of the pope within the church and affirmed the authority of the clergy over the

246. Des heiligen concilii tzu Costentz, der heylgen Christenheit und hochlöblichen keyssers Sigmunds und auch des teutzschen adels entschuldigung, das in bruder Martin Luder mit unwarheit auffgelegt, sie haben Johannem Huss und Hieronymum von Prag wider babstlich, christlich, keyserlich geleidt und eydt vorbrandt.

247. An den Grossmechtigsten und Durchlüchtigsten adel tütscher nation das sye den christlichen glauben beschirmen / wyder den zerstoror des glaubens christi / Martinum Luther eine verfierer der einfeltigen christen.

248. Wider das unchristliche Buch Martini Luthers Augustiners an den Deutschen Adel ausgangen Vorlegung Hieronymi Emser an gemeyne Hochlöbliche Teutsche Nation.

249. Thome Rhadini Todeschi Placentini ord. pre. ad illustriss. et invictiss. Principes et populos Germanie in Martinum Lutherum Wittenbergensem or. here. Nationis gloriam violantim: Oratio.

250. Ein Sermon darinnen sich Bruder Augustinus von Alveldt . . . des so in Bruder Martinus Luther . . . under vil schmelichen namen gelestert / und geschent / beclaget / und wie Augustinus forder wyder Martinum (tzu erkennen wie gesunt sein lere sey) tzu schreyben wiln hat. Auch mith eynem tzu satz / etlichen dinges sso vom Bruder Martinum Luther newlich von der messe geschriben ist.

251. Ein christliche und briederliche ermanung zu dem hochgelerten doctor Martino Luter Augustiner orden zu Wittemberg (Dz er etlichen reden von dem neuen testament der heilligen messe gethon) abstande / und wid mit gemeiner christenheit sich vereinige.

252. Assertio septem sacramentorum adversus Marti. Lutherum, aedita ab invictissimo Angliae et Franciae rege et dom. Hyberniae Henrico eius nominis octavo.

sacraments, they were generally addressed to a learned audience, and they were often written in Latin. Consequently they did not have the same popular impact as Luther's works in German.²⁵³ Nevertheless, in the early months of 1523, the controversialists' writings were important enough that Melanchthon felt compelled to condemn them as the vile spew of a dragon. By connecting the papal bulls and the Romanists' writings with the monster's tail/dragon's mouth, Melanchthon used a medieval commonplace to characterize them as the lies of false teachers that misled the faithful.

The Animalized Monstrosity of the Papal Antichrist

In crafting *The Pope-Ass Explained*, Melanchthon followed the metaphorical approach of *The Anatomy of the Antichrist* (discussed in chapter 3). It is not known whether Melanchthon read Brunfels's edition of the *Anatomy*, whether he read another extant source, or whether, as a well-read scholar, he simply knew the same anatomical tropes that the author of the *Anatomy* knew. The parallels are striking and worth summarizing. For both documents, the head stands for the pope's claim to be the head of the church; the hands represent papal jurisdictional claims; the feet symbolize the clerical servants of the pope; the belly and breasts depict the gluttony, greed, and carnality of the clergy; the scales stand for defense of the papal regime; and the tail represents the false teaching of the pope and his supporters. These similarities demonstrate that Melanchthon and the author of *The Anatomy of the Antichrist* shared a common vocabulary and tropological understanding of the anatomical metaphor of the papal Antichrist.²⁵⁴

Conclusion

In *The Pope-Ass Explained*, Melanchthon cleverly weaves together a number of themes in his explication of the papal regime. As a firm believer in the validity of portents for discerning divine intention, he views the Roman monster as a salutary admonition from God, to "guard against the accursed Antichrist and his followers" [379/20]. Further, he draws on the late medieval tradition of the physiognomy of the Antichrist to develop metaphors about the monster's body parts, relying on commonplaces from the papal Antichrist tradition. He assumes that the monster is a figure of the Antichrist proper,

253. Edwards, "Catholic Controversial Literature," 189–95.

254. For a more detailed discussion of the similarities between *The Pope-Ass Explained* and *Anatomy of the Antichrist*, see Buck, "Anatomia Antichristi," 355–57, 364–66.

one of the multiple precursors also called Antichrists. He also assumes that the monster is both a genuine historical phenomenon, found on the banks of the Tiber, and an embodiment of the collective evil within the contemporary Roman Church (the mystical Antichrist). He sees the chimera as a sign of the impending end of days, against which believers must take special care so as to avoid seduction. And he contrasts the true church, which is spiritual, with the corrupted contemporary church, which has a pope as its corporeal head. All of these assumptions can be found in the papal Antichrist tradition of the late Middle Ages.

Melanchthon incorporates numerous references to the polemics of the reform movement. His list of topics includes papal primacy, ecclesiology, meritorious works, confession, penance, the mass, indulgences, veneration of relics, celibacy, vows, papal secular jurisdiction, Scholasticism, canon law, clerical concupiscence, the nexus of feudal and ecclesiastical authority, nonviolent religious change, and the publications of the Catholic controversialists. He manages to incorporate all of these topics under the rubrics of the chimera's body parts while paying close attention to the conventional commonplaces of papal antichristology, the animalized metaphor, and key ideas of the early Lutheran movement. In a world in which portents and the Antichrist were taken in dead earnest, an explication of a bizarre monstrosity as a figure of the papal Antichrist had a powerful impact.

Exactly how powerful this effect was can be judged by looking at the numerous reprintings and translations of the tract, the frequent reproduction of the monster's image, and its use in encyclopedic wonder-books and in Protestant-Catholic polemics during the latter part of the sixteenth century. The historical impact of the pope-ass is the subject of the next chapter.

The Diffusion of the Roman Monster within the Discourse of the Reformation



DURING THE COURSE OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY, the Roman monster became one of the most notorious prodigies of early modern Europe.¹ Its image appeared in religious polemics in Germany, Switzerland, France, the Low Countries, and England. It achieved its fame through the numerous reprintings and translations of Melanchthon's pamphlet, through Luther's use of the pope-ass as a polemical trope, through citations and illustrations in the popular new genre known as wonder-books, and through the adoption of the monstrous image in Catholic-Protestant controversial literature beyond Germany in the latter part of the century. In England, for example, when faced with resurgent Catholicism at home and abroad, Protestants appropriated the pope-ass in their defense of the Elizabethan religious settlement. This chapter focuses on the various ways that the Roman monster became diffused throughout the rhetoric of the Reformation during the sixteenth century.

Editions and Translations of *The Pope-Ass Explained*

The editors of the Weimar edition of Luther's works have constructed a careful inventory and chronology of the printing history of Melanchthon's *The Pope-Ass Explained*.² The pamphlet appeared alone, in joint publications with Luther's monk-calf tract, and in a revision that Melanchthon made in 1535. The printings as a single item included one version entitled the *Figur des Antichristlichen Bapsts*, Melanchthon's first draft, printed in Wittenberg in 1523. The reworked, final version of 1523 was printed alone two times (in Strasbourg and Erfurt) and many more times in combination with Luther's monk-calf pamphlet. In addition to the 1523 Wittenberg joint publication (designated as

1. Spinks, *Monstrous Births and Visual Culture*, 59.

2. WA, 11:361–66.

A1 in the Weimar edition),³ there were seven additional printings (one from Wittenberg, one from Basel, and five with no place of publication indicated). In 1535, Melanchthon revised his text, expanding and intensifying his attack on the papacy.⁴ Accompanying this version was a postscript from Luther. The 1535 revision was published in Wittenberg and again that same year without place of publication, but with a text that closely followed the Wittenberg copy. In 1549, Matthias Flacius Illyricus republished Melanchthon's 1523 text with various modifications and with his own introduction. In sum, the Weimar editors report fourteen High German printings of Melanchthon's pamphlet between 1523 and 1549. In addition, they list a copy published in Low German,⁵ a French translation (published in Geneva in 1557), a Dutch translation based on the French text, an English translation, likewise based on the French source, and a Latin translation (of the 1535 revision). Hartmann Grisar has found at least four other printings from the sixteenth century that the Weimar editors overlooked.⁶ Historians estimate that in the sixteenth century a single printing of a pamphlet produced approximately one thousand copies.⁷ This would mean that, over the course of the sixteenth century, there would have been more than twenty thousand copies of *The Pope-Ass Explained* circulating in various formats and languages.

Luther's Vocabulary of Asininity

The reprints of Melanchthon's pamphlet were not the only means for disseminating the image and interpretation of the Roman monster. Luther was a very prolific author whose works were frequently reproduced and widely read. As he developed his polemical rhetoric, the image of the pope-ass and the vocabulary of asininity became commonplaces in his antipapal attacks. Already in 1522, even before Melanchthon had written *The Pope-Ass Explained*, Luther described the monster in starkly apocalyptic terms in his sermon for the Second Sunday in Advent. He based this sermon on Luke 21:25–36, which describes the signs that will foretell the approaching end of the world. To make

3. WA, 11:375–79.

4. Spinks, *Monstrous Births and Visual Culture*, 78. The 1535 revision was titled *Der BapstEsel durch M. Philipppum Melanchthon gedeutet und gebessert, mit D. Mart. Luth. Amen.*; see Köhler, *Flugschriften des späteren 16. Jahrhunderts*, fiche no. 1395.

5. Grisar and Heege, *Luthers Kampfbilder*, vol. 3, *Der Bilderkampf . . . 1523 bis 1545*, 21, contend that there were at least two Low German versions.

6. *Ibid.*, 21–22.

7. Köhler, "The *Flugschriften* and Their Importance in Religious Debate," 154.

the point that the signs of the end were manifest, he cited recent instances of solar and lunar eclipses, meteor showers, the outbreak of the French pox, and the appearance of the Roman monster, which he interpreted both as an apocalyptic portent and as a symbol of the papacy:

No astronomer will say that the course of the heavens foretold the coming of the terrible beast which the Tiber threw up a few years ago; a beast with the head of an ass, the breast and body of a woman, the foot of an elephant for its right hand, with the scales of a fish on its legs, and the head of a dragon in its hinder parts, etc. This beast typifies the papacy and the great wrath and punishment of God. Such a mass of signs presages greater results than the mind of man can conceive.⁸

Luther wrote many sermons on the lections for various seasons of the church year: Advent sermons, Christmas sermons, Lenten sermons, etc. The sermon for the Second Sunday in Advent was printed repeatedly from the 1520s through the 1540s, alone and in various combinations with other sermons for the church year. Wittenberg printers produced most of these editions, but print shops in Magdeburg and Strasbourg also published sermon collections.⁹ The large number of printings indicates the popularity of Luther's homilies. The ready availability of the sermon for the Second Sunday in Advent helped keep the image of the Roman monster fresh in the imagination of listeners and readers.

Luther also helped to promote the notoriety of the monster through the approbation that he added to Melanchthon's 1535 expanded version of *The Pope-Ass Explained*. In this short addendum, Luther appropriates the image of the pope-ass and its apocalyptic meaning into his antipapal vocabulary. He compares the papacy to the inhabitants of the city of Sodom. Just as they lived in wantonness and ignored warnings from God, so "the lords in the papacy" live in sin, reject God's word, and mock and laugh at the gospel and Christian belief. The pope-ass is dreadful and ugly, but what is more terrifying is the fact that God himself made this monstrous image as an indication of his intentions. The papacy seeks to kill or expel its opponents; it condemns God's word and calls it heresy. It "may be called the true dragon's head, the one who gawks out of the backside of the pope-ass and spews forth such vile dung and filth."¹⁰

8. WML, 10:70; St.L., 11:56–57; WA, 10.1/2:105.

9. For the publication history of the sermon for the Second Sunday in Advent, see WA, 10.1/2: xiv–xxi.

10. St.L., 19:1939–40; Melanchthon, *Der BapstEsel* (1535), Cii[r]; Spinks, *Monstrous Births and Visual*

Luther's reliance on the vocabulary of asininity can again be seen in two of his most virulent antipapal works written in the mid-1540s: *Depiction of the Papacy* (1545) and *Against the Roman Papacy, an Institution of the Devil* (1545). The former is a picture book with short passages of commentary; the latter is a powerful screed drafted at the request of Elector John Frederick of Saxony to provide support for the Protestants as they faced both the convening of the Council of Trent under unfavorable conditions and the imminent outbreak of religious warfare (the Schmalkaldic War, 1546–47). Though quite different in format, these two works are closely related.

The *Depiction of the Papacy*, probably intended as illustrations for *Against the Roman Papacy*,¹¹ consists of nine woodcut images made by Lucas Cranach (or his workshop). Each has a Latin title above the picture and a brief German text, signed by Luther, at the bottom of the page. The pictures were published as single sheets as well as in book form.¹² Three of the images make clear reference either to the pope as an ass or to the pope-ass monster itself. The picture entitled *The Kingdom of Satan and the Pope, 2 Thess. 2* also served as an illustration for the title page of *Against the Roman Papacy*. The scriptural reference (at verse 4) speaks of the revelation of the man of sin, the son of perdition. It thus ties into the German text, which states, "In the name of all devils the pope sits here, now revealed as the true Antichrist as proclaimed in scripture."¹³ The woodcut shows the pope seated on a decrepit throne, suspended over the flaming maw of hell. Demons attend him on all sides. His donkey ears are smoothed back so that two demons can place the papal tiara on his head (see fig. 4).

Another woodcut is a double image, the left side of which is entitled *The Pope Offers a Council in Germany*. This image shows a picture of a pope riding a sow. The image on the right is entitled *Pope, Doctor of Theology, and Master of Faith*. It depicts an ass crowned with the papal tiara, seated on a throne, and playing a bagpipe. The German text below reads, "Only the pope can interpret

Culture, 78.

11. LW, 41:261.

12. Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk*, 282n74. All of the illustrations are reproduced in WA, 54, unpag., after p. 530, "Papstspottbilder." See also Grisar and Heege, *Luthers Kampfbilder*, vol. 4, *Die Abbildung des Papsttums*, 16–62. For Cranach's role in the production of these images, see *ibid.*, 4:34–35. See also Edwards, *Luther's Last Battles*, 190–98.

13. Edwards, *Luther's Last Battles*, 190; WA, 54, "Papstspottbilder," ill. 9.



Figure 4: *Regnum satanae et papae*, from *Depiction of the Papacy* (1545) by Martin Luther and Lucas Cranach. Courtesy of the Special Collections Department, Bryn Mawr College Library.



Figure 5: *Papa dat concilium in Germania* and *Papa doctor theologiae et magister fidei*, from *Depiction of the Papacy* (1545) by Martin Luther and Lucas Cranach. Courtesy of the Special Collections Department, Bryn Mawr College Library.

the scripture and sweep away error, just as only a donkey can pipe and sound the right notes”¹⁴ (see fig. 5).

The most direct reference to the pope-ass is a reproduction of Cranach’s illustration for Melancthon’s 1523 pamphlet. It bears the Latin title *The Monster of Rome, Found Dead in the Tiber*, 1496. The German text at the bottom of the page reads, “What God himself thinks of the papacy is shown here by this horrible picture, which should horrify all who would take it to heart”¹⁵ (see fig. 6).

14. WA, 54, “Papstspottbilder,” ill. 4; Edwards, *Luther’s Last Battles*, 196.

15. Edwards, *Luther’s Last Battles*, 195; WA, 54, “Papstspottbilder,” ill. 2.

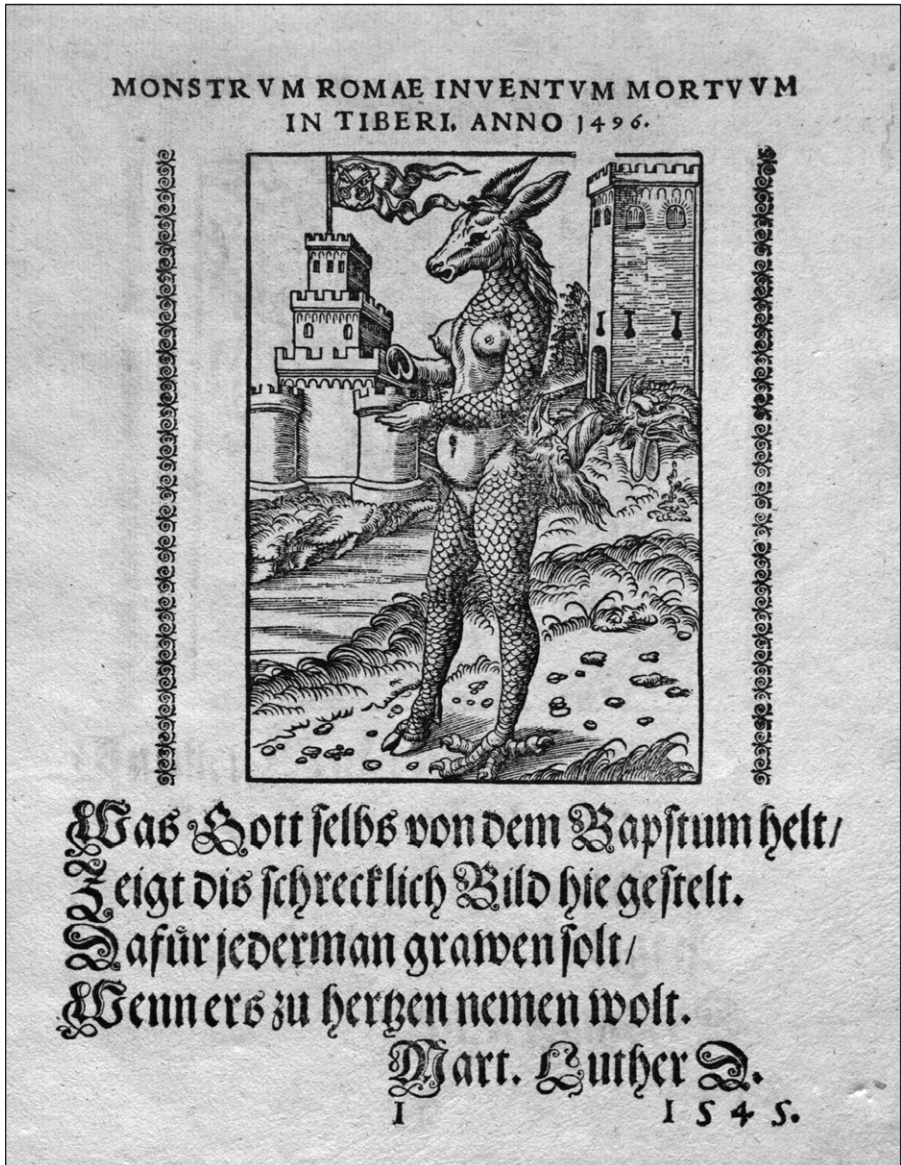


Figure 6: *Monstrum Romae inventum mortuum in Tiberi anno 1496*, from *Depiction of the Papacy* (1545) by Martin Luther and Lucas Cranach. Courtesy of the Special Collections Department, Bryn Mawr College Library.

The companion piece to these pictures was Luther's *Against the Roman Papacy, an Institution of the Devil*.¹⁶ In it he rallies the Protestant cause with a hard-hitting attack against the "demonic" institution of the papacy. He deals with three main topics: the claim that the pope is the head of the church, the contention that the pope may be judged by no one, and the idea that the pope had transferred the Roman Empire from the Greeks to the Germans (*translatio imperii*). All of these were key points in his arguments against papal jurisdictional claims. In his 1545 tracts, Luther makes extensive use of tropes that apply the pope-ass to the papacy. Thanks to the well-understood commonplace that associated the ass with a variety of negative connotations, he was able to use these references to amplify his criticisms of the pope. In fact, the rhetoric of asininity served as a potent literary weapon in the two antipapal tracts of 1545.

Chapter 1 of this study provided a number of examples from the late Middle Ages to document the point that the ass was a powerful symbol that connoted foolishness, false belief, scorn, ridicule, and defamation. In *Against the Roman Papacy*, Luther repeatedly refers to the pope as the pope-ass (*Bapstesel*).¹⁷ He calls the pope "the crude crass ass and fool" ("der grobe, grosse Esel und Narr"),¹⁸ "the senseless fool and pope-ass" ("der unsinnige Narr und Bapstesel"),¹⁹ and "a delirious, senseless fool, the very pope-ass" ("einen rasenden, unsinnigen Narren, den tollen Bapstesel").²⁰ He refers to the papal church as a "donkey stable" ("Esel stall").²¹

In *Against the Roman Papacy*, Luther also makes specific references to asinine characteristics of the cartoon images in the *Depiction of the Papacy*. For example, in his introductory comments, he says "I shall again take up his [the pope's] crude bulls and briefs and try to see if I can comb out the crass, crude donkey's long unkempt ears for him" ("will ich wider an seine Bullen und Brieve mich machen und versuchen, ob ich dem grossen, groben Esel seine lange, ungekemmte ohren kemmen müge").²² This is a reference to the title page illustration, "The Kingdom of Satan and the Pope," that shows the

16. WA, 54:206–99; LW, 41:263–376.

17. To convey the force of Luther's language, I provide the German original as well as an English translation.

18. WA, 54:271/8–9; LW, 41:341.

19. WA, 54:278/26; LW, 41:351.

20. WA, 54:278/31–32; LW, 41:351.

21. WA, 54:286/6, 35; LW, 41:360–61.

22. WA, 54:228/27–29; LW, 41:290.

pope with donkey ears suspended over the mouth of hell.²³ Another reference to donkey ears occurs at the very end of the tract where Luther addresses the pope directly: “Here now, Pope-Ass, with your long ass’s ears and your damned lying mouth.” (HJe her nu, Bapstesel, mit deinen langen Esels ohren und verdampfen lügen maul!)²⁴

The picture of an ass sitting on a throne, wearing the papal tiara and playing a bagpipe, illustrates another of Luther’s points (fig. 5). The image itself conveys the meaning of something that is attempting a task for which it is not suited.²⁵ It is worth noting that the ass’s tiara has a lily on its tip, an emblem associated with the Farnese coat of arms of Pope Paul III, who had set the conditions for the meeting of the Council of Trent that were unfavorable to the Protestants.²⁶ Luther attacks the papal claim to the power of the keys, the power of binding and loosing sins. In so doing he makes the comment, “Friend, draw for me here [a picture] of the pope-ass with a bagpipe” (“Lieber, male mir hie den Bapstesel mit einer sackpfeiffen”).²⁷

Throughout the treatise, Luther uses scatological language to intensify his asinine references. In so doing, he is not being gratuitously vulgar, though it may sound that way to the modern reader. Medieval demonology associated demons and devils with the bowels and defecation. Demons were thought to live in the bowels of humans, where they caused gastric distress. In popular folklore, the privy was the favorite haunt of demons and evil spirits.²⁸ In literature, one of the best-known examples of this scatological topos occurs in the *Canterbury Tales*’ “Prologue of the Summoner’s Tale,” where Satan’s arse serves as the hive for a nest of demonic friars.

Luther thus draws on shared assumptions of medieval popular culture in crafting his antipapal propaganda. For example, the pope-ass becomes an ass-fart pope (“Eselfartz-Bapst”), or an ass-pope fart (“EselBapstfartz”), or the fart-ass at Rome (“der fartz Esel zu Rom”),²⁹ or pope fart-ass (“Bapst Fartzesel”),³⁰

23. LW, 41:290n65.

24. WA, 54:298/334–35; LW, 41:376.

25. Scribner, “Demons, Defecation and Monsters,” 292.

26. Ibid.

27. WA, 54:270/23–24; LW, 41:341.

28. Scribner, “Demons, Defecation and Monsters,” 283.

29. WA, 54:266/19, 24; 222/4.

30. WA, 54:266/9.

or simply ass-pope (“Eselbapst”).³¹ Luther refers to the pope-ass as farting and making a fool of himself (“wie hat sich der Bapstesel beschiessen [=blamiert]”).³² Referring to papal decrees and decretals, Luther writes, “But all of this is sealed with the devil’s own dirt, and written with the ass-pope’s farts.” (“Ist aber alles mit Teufels dreck versiegelt, und mit Bapstesels förtzen geschrieben.”)³³ When discussing papal jurisdictional claims based on John 21:15 (“Feed my lambs”), Luther comments, “I was frightened and thought I was dreaming, it was such a thunderclap, such a great horrid fart did the papal ass let go! He certainly pressed with great might to let out such a thunderous fart—it is a wonder that it did not tear his hole and belly apart!” (“Ich bin erschrocken, und meinete trawen, es donnerte so seer, so gar einen grossen scheuslichen fortz der Bapstesel hie lies fahren. Er hat gewislich mit grosser macht gedrückt, das er solchen donnerfortz heraus pausst hat, wunder ists, das jm das loch und bauch nicht zurissen sind.”)³⁴ Luther’s appropriation of the pope-ass as a weapon in his polemical arsenal contributed to its fame in sixteenth-century Europe.³⁵ But he and Melancthon were not alone in their assumption that the Roman monster was an important divine portent.

The Roman Monster in Wonder-Book Literature

The world of the late Middle Ages was convinced that Judgment Day was at hand and that God was sending signs as warnings of the end, as foretold in scripture in Matthew 24 and Luke 21. Assuming that God speaks through such signs, it made sense to late medieval Christians to collect, catalogue, and interpret these unusual occurrences. This was the rationale behind a new literary genre that became quite popular: the wonder-book.³⁶ The authors of

31. WA, 54:266/14.

32. WA, 54:221/5, 221n2.

33. WA, 54:265/17.

34. WA, 54:273/22–26; LW 41:344–45.

35. An example of the artistic and literary impact of the pope-ass can be seen in Johann Sieder’s 1538 translation of Apuleius’s *Golden Ass* into German. The title page of this work shows the protagonist, Lucius, midway through his transformation from ass to human. “If we compare the Papstesel with the half-asinine Lucius . . . we can easily discern a close family resemblance. Lucius’s head is turned, and he’s missing a tail, but otherwise the two have a similar pose. . . . Lucius, of course, lacks the breasts of the Papstesel, but the artist has used the outline of the *Esel’s mons veneris* to create a sort of jockstrap for his masculine figure.” Given Augsburg’s conversion to Lutheranism in 1537, the publisher, Alexander Weissenhorn, no doubt intended his readers “to notice the resemblance and associate the two figures. . . . [T]he figure [of Lucius] was supposed to tickle their Lutheran sympathies and their funny bone at the same time.” Gaiser, *Fortunes of Apuleius and the Golden Ass*, 256. For a full discussion of this topic, see *ibid.*, 248–57, esp. *ills.* on 254–55.

36. See Schenda, “Die deutschen Prodigiensammlungen,” 638–709; Schenda, *Die französische Prodigien-*

these catalogues of omens added the Roman monster to their list of supernatural phenomena and thus helped to give it further notoriety. Some authors focused primarily on monstrosity as one of many signs of the imminent end of days. Others added an antipapal interpretation to their apocalyptic catalogue. In the mid-sixteenth century, many Protestants came to believe that miracles, inexplicable occurrences in nature, and portents of all kinds were appearing with unprecedented frequency. Luther himself had argued this point in his sermon for the Second Sunday in Advent. Many of the best minds among his followers picked up on this point and expanded his modest list into massive catalogues with illustrations and commentary.

Job (Hiob) Fincel's *Portents* (*Wunderzeichen*) provides an excellent entrée into the genre of wonder-books. He collected examples from a wide range of reports, which he explicated as signs from God foretelling the imminent end of time. Like many other wonder-book authors, he brought a strong Lutheran perspective to his interpretations. Born into a Lutheran family in Weimar, he studied at Erfurt, Jena, and Wittenberg, where he was a student of Melanchthon and completed his master of arts degree in 1549. In 1559, he became a professor of philosophy at the University of Jena; however, he quickly changed course, for in 1562 he completed his doctorate in medicine. The next year he joined the medical faculty at Jena. An avid collector of broadsheets and pamphlets, he published his first wonder-book in 1556, based in part on his collection.³⁷ This volume and the two volumes that soon followed cover the time period from 1517 to March 1562. Floods, earthquakes, conflagrations, wars, civil unrest, malformed infants, monstrous animals, and infestations make up his list of portents. He interprets them all as divine warnings to a godless world. For Fincel, the center of godlessness was Rome, the contemporary Sodom; the hope for salvation was Dr. Luther, whose teachings could lead Christendom out from Sodom.

This is the interpretive context within which Fincel cites the Roman monster. Although the creature's appearance in 1496 falls outside of his chronology, he nevertheless includes it towards the end of the first book. He provides a detailed description of the chimera's body: an ass's head with very long ears,

literatur; and Wilson, *Signs and Portents*. Wilson, 195–203, provides a list of primary sources relating to monstrous births, mainly in France and England. See also Barnes, *Prophecy and Gnosis*, 87–91; and Soergel, *Miracles and the Protestant Imagination*, 1–32.

37. Job Fincel, *Wunderzeichen: Warhafftige beschreibung und gründlich verzeichnus schrecklicher Wunderzeichen und Geschichten . . .* (Nuremberg: Berg and Neuber, 1556). See also Soergel, *Miracles and the Protestant Imagination*, 67–92.

a right hand like an elephant's foot, a human left hand, a right foot like an ox's hoof, a left foot like a griffon's claw, a woman's belly and breasts, neck, arms, and legs covered with fish scales, a hoary old man's head on the rump, and a long dragon's head protruding from the backside with a gaping maw out of which spews fire. "Such a monster [Wundertier] exactly describes the papacy, as one can learn from the explanation of the monster, which you can find in the second part of the books of Luther published in Jena, folio 286."³⁸

Another important Lutheran collector and interpreter of prodigies was Kaspar Goltwurm.³⁹ He came from Sterzing [Vipiteno] in South Tyrol. Born in 1524, he spent time as a wandering scholar in Italy before studying at Wittenberg, Leipzig, and Jena. He served as a court chaplain for Count Philip IV of Nassau-Weilburg. As a church administrator for the count, he drafted the first Protestant church ordinance for Nassau-Weilburg. In 1557 he published his *Book of Miracles and Portents* (*Wunderwerck und Wunderzeichen Buch*).⁴⁰ In his dedication to Landgrave Philip of Hesse he makes clear his view on prodigies:

Not only do we have true and earnest warnings from the prophets, the apostles, and Christian writings, but we also have such warnings preached to us on a daily basis. He who disdains these warnings and persists in living a godless life will soon endure punishment along with Sodom, Gomorrah, and other godless people. God will, however, graciously know to comfort and sustain his church and people in all such dangers just as he did for Noah, Abraham, and Lot.⁴¹

Goltwurm drew his miracles and portents from antiquity, scripture, and the Middle Ages, as well as from contemporary events. He organized his material thematically (not chronologically) around different kinds of wonders: divine, spiritual, celestial, elemental, earthly, and satanic. Convinced that wonders comprised an "alternative language" that God used to communicate with

38. Quoted in Schilling, "Job Fintel und die Zeichen der Endzeit," 350. For discussions of Job Fintel, see Spinks, *Monstrous Births and Visual Cultures*, 84 and 92–96; Schilling, "Job Fintel und die Zeichen der Endzeit," 327–50; Soergel, *Miracles and the Protestant Imagination*, 67–92.

39. This name is also spelled Caspar Goldwurm. For a discussion of Goldwurm, see Soergel, *Miracles and the Protestant Imagination*, 93–123.

40. In 1567 this work appeared under the title *Wunderzeichen: Das ist: Warhafftige Beschreibunge . . .*, printed in Frankfurt a. M. This copy is available online through the Münchner DigitalisierungsZentrum Digitale Bibliothek at urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb00010246–3.

41. Goltwurm, *Wunderzeichen* (1567), unpaginated preface, partially quoted in Deneke, "Kaspar Goltwurm," 134.

the faithful, Goltwurm attempted to develop a system of classification aimed at explaining the “rhetorical tropes through which the Creator spoke when he intervened in the natural order.”⁴² In part 5, in a section entitled “Concerning the marvelous forms of some animals and what they mean,” he included a section on the Roman monster. As in Fincel’s treatment, Goltwurm gave a detailed description of the creature, noting that Martin Luther had interpreted this monster as representing the papacy. Like Fincel, he gave the same folio reference to the Jena edition of Luther’s works.⁴³

Christoph Irenaeus (d. 1595) was yet another important Lutheran wonder-book author. Born in Silesia and educated at Wittenberg, he became a follower of Matthias Flacius, leader of the so-called Gnesio (or genuine) Lutherans, a faction that emphasized human nature’s depraved, sinful condition and opposed Philip Melanchthon’s teachings and leadership of the Lutheran movement. A prolific author, Irenaeus wrote numerous polemical works defending the Flacian teaching on original sin as well as devotional works and wonder-books. In his *De monstis: Von seltsamen Wundergeburten* (1584), he argued the Flacian teaching “that all creation had been depraved by the rebellion of Adam and Eve and that humankind’s divine likeness had been transmogrified into a demonic essence.”⁴⁴ Although Irenaeus wrote from this overarching point of view, when he came to listing and describing specific monstrosities, he usually presented a simple, straightforward account with minimal interpretive comment.⁴⁵ Thus, his entry for the year 1496 simply describes the horrible sea monster (“schrecklich Meerwunder”) found in the Tiber: head like that of an ass, right hand like an elephant’s foot, right foot like an ox’s, left foot like a griffon’s claw, female breasts and belly, scales, rump face, tail like a dragon’s head, etc. Following this depiction he adds, “You will find the image of this monster together with its meaning in the second German part of the books of Luther [published] in Jena.” With this reference, Irenaeus, like Fincel and Goltwurm before him, endorsed Luther’s view of the monster.⁴⁶

42. Soergel, *Miracles and the Protestant Imagination*, 94.

43. Goltwurm, *Wunderzeichen* (1567), fol. CVII[v].

44. Soergel, *Miracles and the Protestant Imagination*, 149–50; for a general discussion of Irenaeus, see 124–52.

45. *Ibid.*, 148.

46. Irenaeus, *De monstis*, “Wundergeburten nach Christi, Erzehlung vieler Exempel von seltsamen,” s.v. 1496.

Arguably the most famous of all Protestant wonder-book authors was Conrad Wolffhart, born in Rufach (Upper Alsace) in 1518. He adopted a humanist name and is better known as Conrad Lycosthenes. He studied at Heidelberg, receiving his master's degree in 1541. Thereafter he moved to Basel, where he held the office of church deacon. He was a Protestant theologian and philologist with a keen interest in prodigies. In 1557 he published his magnum opus entitled *Chronicle of Prodigies and Signs* (*Prodigiorum ac ostentorum chronicon*).⁴⁷ That same year Johann Herold made a German translation of Lycosthenes's *Chronicle* that he entitled *Wunderwerck oder Gottes unergründtliches vorbilden*.⁴⁸ Herold, a printer, translator, and assistant pastor in Basel, added a lengthy introduction in which he discussed various categories of monstrosities. The translation ensured that the Latin original would reach an audience of German readers.

Lycosthenes viewed almost anything weird or seemingly contrary to nature as a wondrous sign. He listed numerous sources—scriptural prophets and evangelists, antique Greek and Latin authors, and various ecclesiastical writers. Included in this list were Job Fincel, Martin Luther, Philip Melancthon, Caspar Peucer,⁴⁹ and the Zurich reformer Heinrich Bullinger. Lycosthenes' massive work was far larger and more comprehensive than those of Fincel and Goltwurm, and included woodcut illustrations on nearly every page. The title page of the *Wunderwerck* deserves comment, for it provides a pictorial representation of Lycosthenes's theme. In the center of the woodcut, Christ the judge sits atop a rainbow, with a sword in his left hand and a lily in his right. Surrounding this image are scenes showing miraculous events from Christ's life that demonstrate his divine mission: the Nativity, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection, and the Ascension. Encircling these biblical scenes are pictures of occurrences or phenomena that seemingly transcend the laws of nature: a flood, a vision of a battle in the sky, a comet, a violent storm, a harpy, the monster of Cracow, a five-headed snake, a mermaid, a merman, an earth-

47. For Lycosthenes, see Brednich, *Enzyklopädie des Märchens*, 8:1323–24; Spinks, *Monstrous Births and Visual Culture*, 96–99; Barnes, *Prophecy and Gnosis*, 90–91.

48. Conrad Lycosthenes, *Wunderwerck oder Gottes unergründtliches vorbilden*, trans. Johann Herold (Basel, 1557).

49. Caspar Peucer, student at Wittenberg, son-in-law to Philip Melancthon, polymath and leading voice for Lutheranism in the late sixteenth century, published a wonder-book in 1553 entitled *Commentarius de praecipuis divinationum generibus . . .* (Wittenberg: J. Crato, 1553). A 1560 printing of this work is available online through Google Books, reproduced from the Bavarian Staatsbibliothek. Folio 447v of the 1560 copy includes a detailed description of the Roman monster.

quake, a centaur, and conjoined twins.⁵⁰ The point is that such prodigies serve as divine warnings of the imminence of the Last Judgment. The wide range of celestial, terrestrial, and teratological wonders anticipates the hundreds of signs that Lycosthenes describes and illustrates beginning with Creation and ending in August 1557.

Through its universal scope, chronological arrangement, and massive list of examples, the *Wunderwerck* creates a cumulative effect, a kind of crescendo that suggests the imminence of the apocalypse. For the year 1496, Lycosthenes presents an illustration of the Roman monster together with a detailed description of the creature's physical features (fig. 7). The woodcut has the ass facing to the right with the right arm/elephant's foot to the front. The background consists of a hilly landscape with the sun on the horizon. Neither the picture nor the description makes reference to the papacy or the papal Antichrist. Rather the emphasis is on the creature's monstrosity. The chimera is listed with other monstrosities: a child born in Cracow with the ears of a hare, the double-bodied sow of Landser, and a two-headed goose from Strasbourg. Though Lycosthenes was a Protestant, he treats the Roman monster as yet another ominous oddity and refrains from giving it the typical antipapal interpretation.

While the illustrations in Lycosthenes's work are simple and ingenuous, that is not the case for all artistic renderings of the monstrosity from the Tiber. A much more nuanced version has recently entered the public domain. It is part of a series of portent representations that the London art dealer Day and Faber has named the Augsburg *Wunderzeichenbuch*. It consists of 167 gouache and watercolor images, 15 x 29 cm. in size, each with a date for the event represented and a three- or four-line descriptive comment at the bottom. The images include scenes from the Old Testament (fols. 1–15), depictions of miracles and marvels from 73 BC to AD 1552 (fols. 16–148), and scenes from the Book of Revelation (fols. 149–67). Internal evidence dates the paintings as mid-sixteenth century and associates them with the city of Augsburg. Watermarks indicate that the paper was manufactured from 1447 to 1552. The text for folio 101, dated 1529, mentions Hans Burgkmair: "I, Hans Burgkmair, bought the skin [of a calf born near Augsburg in Langweid] for half a guilder." This likely refers to Burgkmair the Elder. His son, Hans Burgkmair II, took over his father's workshop after the latter's death in 1531. It

50. Spinks, *Monstrous Births and Visual Culture*, 97–98; Ewink, *De monstis*, 31.



Figure 7: Roman monster from Conrad Lycosthenes's *Wunderwerck oder Gottes unergründliches Vorbilden* (1557). Courtesy of the Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana.

seems possible that the younger Burgkmair might have painted at least some of the images in this collection. There are also some paintings in a style similar to that of Heinrich Vogtherr II (1513–68).⁵¹ Stylistic analysis suggests that at least four different artists contributed to the project.

51. This descriptive information comes from Mr. James Faber of Day and Faber, Old Master and Nineteenth-Century Drawings and Paintings, 14 Old Bond Street, London, UK. See also *Das Wunderzeichenbuch*, a privately printed descriptive catalogue containing nineteen reproductions with English



Figure 8: Roman monster from the Augsburg *Wunderzeichenbuch* (mid-sixteenth century). Courtesy of anonymous private collection.

Details in the picture of the Roman monster indicate that the artist used both the version by Lucas Cranach and the version by Wenzel von Olmütz as his sources (fig. 8). Like the Cranach picture, the Augsburg portrayal has an elephant's foot (rather than an elephant's trunk) as the right hand and shows the Tor di Nona as a tall, elongated building. Also, the dragon's neck has no tags hanging down and the foreground is littered with stones. On the other hand, like the copy by Wenzel von Olmütz, the foreground of the Augsburg version has an amphora standing next to the creature and it places the door of the Tor di Nona facing the viewer. Evidently, a copy of the Bohemian reproduction was available in Augsburg as well as in Wittenberg.

It is noteworthy that the Augsburg copy softens the polemical aspects of the two sources. For example, the banner atop the Castel Sant'Angelo is reduced to the size of a pennant, and the cross-keys, a symbol of disputed papal jurisdictional claims, are gone. Neither of the controversial superscripts

translations of the descriptive comments. The Augsburg *Wunderzeichenbuch* is now in a private collection.

("Roma caput mundi" or "Der Bapstesel zu Rom") is included. Also, the rendering of the creature de-emphasizes its sexual features. The breasts have no dugs; the pudendum is obscured. The figure is still monstrous, but it no longer conveys the notion of the "whore of Babylon," the Protestant characterization of the papacy. The representation of the Roman monster in the Augsburg *Wunderzeichenbuch* is similar to the approach in Lycosthenes, i.e., a focus on an apocalyptic, monstrous portent rather than on polemical antipapalism. One could argue that this change in perspective reflects the altered circumstances of Lutheranism within Germany in midcentury. With the Peace of Passau (1552), the Lutherans gained freedom from Charles V's efforts to enforce Catholic uniformity throughout the empire. In 1555, the Religious Peace of Augsburg gave legal recognition to Lutheranism and authorized the princes, imperial knights, and imperial cities to choose between Lutheranism and Catholicism. In this postwar climate, the artists for the Augsburg *Wunderzeichenbuch* may have no longer felt it necessary to use the Roman monster as a weapon against the papal Antichrist.

After the Religious Peace of Augsburg, the Protestant struggle against the hegemony of the Roman church moved from Germany to France, Holland, and England. There Calvinists, Huguenots, and Puritans faced off against a revitalized post-Tridentine Catholicism. In this struggle, the Roman monster continued to play a role, though it was no longer as central as it had been for Luther. The situation in England offers a good illustration of how the wonder-book and the Roman monster were appropriated and changed to fit the local needs of the Protestant cause.

In 1581, Stephen Batman published *The Doome warning all men to the Iudgement*, based on Conrad Lycosthenes' *Prodigiorum ac ostentorum chronicon*. It was more than a mere translation; it followed the latter's structure and sequence of topics, but liberally departed from the literal text. Also, Batman added new material for the period of 1558 to 1581, describing *The Doome* as a "collection, translation, and interpretation."⁵²

In addition to being a translator, Batman was a cleric and an author. He studied at Cambridge, held a bachelor of laws and a doctor of divinity, and served as a domestic chaplain for the archbishop of Canterbury, Matthew Parker, and in a variety of other ecclesiastical positions.⁵³ Besides the

52. "Epistle Dedicatorie," in Batman, *The Doome*, iii.

53. For biographical information on Stephen Batman, see *DNB*, s.v. "Batman"; and McNair, "Introduction" in Batman, *The Doome* (1581), iii–xii.

The Doome, he authored other works that demonstrated his learning, piety, and wide range of interests and that were theological, historical, or polemical in nature.

In his wonder-book, his purpose was to describe the many divine portents that foretold “dangers to happen among the generations of this last posteritie.”⁵⁴ In other words, like many of his contemporaries, he assumed that the end was at hand. But his work was more than an apocalyptic admonition, for he wrote as a partisan in the Protestant-Catholic conflict that dominated the first two decades of Elizabeth’s reign. Specifically, he took part in the controversy over the proposed marriage between Queen Elizabeth and Francis, Duke of Anjou.⁵⁵ In *The Doome*, Batman entered the ranks of those opposing the union of the Protestant queen to the brother of the Catholic king of France,⁵⁶ though in a cautious and understated way. English Protestants feared the prospect of a French Catholic gaining influence over their queen. Even worse, they feared that their forty-year-old queen might die in childbirth, leaving a French Catholic in charge of the realm. Batman’s argument is subtle and indirect: Prodigies prefigure political disasters. The numerous portents that he chronicles warn of the likelihood of such occurrences. Only the grace of God and the leadership of the Virgin Queen can save England. In a prayer that he inserts before the section containing his own post-1558 additions he makes his point carefully:

Geue grace, most holy Father, to all that shall reade the same [*Dooome warning*], that they may perceiue to what end thy gracious goodnesse hath pretended this worke as a fragment among other moste holy edicions, to warne this later age, by the comming and dayly appearing of unaccustomed prodigies, to be the onely foretoken of mans destruction for sinnes, as in the time of olde, hayles, fires from heauen, thunderinges, Eclipses, blasing stares, Elementall shewes of armies, raining of blood, milke, stones, earth, figures of dead bodyes, and instrumentes of warre, besides dreadfull voyces, after sundrye manners: On the Earth deformed shapes both of men, byrdes, beastes, and fishes after which of euery of these death of princes, alteration of kingdoms, transmutations of religion, treasons,

54. Batman, *The Doome* (1581), ii.

55. See MacCaffrey, “The Anjou Match and the Making of Elizabethan Foreign Policy.”

56. See McNair, “Introduction,” in Batman, *The Doome*, iv. McNair argues that Batman’s references to a plague of mice in Essex and a flock of owls that fed on them were veiled references to the French (mice) and the Spanish (owls) as can be proved by Batman’s manuscript commonplace book. McNair concludes, “Batman’s book is topical—an attack on Elizabeth’s proposed ‘French marriage,’” iv.

murthers, thefte, inceste, whoredome, Idolatrie, vsurie, reuenge, persecution, sworde, fyre, famine, hunger, death and damnation, presently followed. O mightie, high and moste gracious God, whiche hast defended thy Church of *England* from the tirannie of superstitious *Rome*, and hast set a virgine Queene to be thy handmayd and officer in thy Church, through whome without the ayde of man, by thy only prouidence, she hath brought forth the child of truth, the word of thy dearely beloued sonne Jesus Christ: Blesse her maiestie O Lord God, with such an ardent zeale of thee, *that neuer any transitory hope of other conioyning may enter her royall minde*, otherwise than to the setting forth of thy glory: Good Lorde blesse her that she be not hurt by hipocrisie, allured by flattery, nor perswaded by tyranny.⁵⁷

Batman's treatment of the Roman monster is like the one found in Lycosthenes, though he gives the description twice. At the end of the second entry he adds, "The learned in Germany wrote earnestly against the Pope, the like occasion was given to other countreys, sithens which time the popish kingdome hath greatly decayed."⁵⁸ The woodcut illustration is also similar to the one in Lycosthenes, but the creature faces left with its left arm/elephant's foot facing the viewer (see fig. 9). Batman makes no mention of Luther or Melanchthon by name, referring only to "the learned in Germany." He ignores the term "pope-ass" and the defamatory vocabulary of asininity, but still construes the grotesque creature as a prefiguration of the decay of the "popish kingdome," and thus implicitly uses it in defense of the Protestant religious settlement in Elizabethan England.

Another English wonder-book that included the Roman monster was Edward Fenton's *Certaine Secrete wonders of Nature . . .* (1569), which was a translation of Pierre Boaistuau's *Histoires prodigieuses* (Paris, 1560).⁵⁹ Fenton was an English navigator, explorer, and soldier of fortune; this publication was apparently his only literary accomplishment. The section on the Roman monster was his addition; it did not appear in the original text.⁶⁰ Boaistuau

57. Batman, *The Doome*, 384, emphasis added.

58. *Ibid.*, 288.

59. Edward Fenton, *Certaine Secrete wonders of Nature, containing a description of sundry strange things seeming monstrous . . .* (London: Henry Bynneman, 1569).

60. Schenda, *Die französische Prodigienliteratur*, 121, implies that a sequel edited by Claude de Tesserant contains a reference to the pope-ass. This is not correct. Tesserant's reference is to a different sea monster sighted in Rome in 1523 and associated with the fall of Rhodes to the Turks. Lycosthenes mentions this same monster.



Figure 9: Roman monster from Stephen Batman's *The Doome warning all men to the Iudgement* (1581). Courtesy of the Spencer Collection, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

was an accomplished French author, editor, and translator who used Conrad Lycosthenes's chronicle as a source of material for stories exploring moral and ethical issues. In his introductory dedication, Boaistuau explains the interconnection between morality and monstrosity:

Among all the things that can be contemplated beneath the concavity of the heavens, nothing is to be seen that more awakens the human spirit, that more ravishes the senses, that more astonishes, that engenders greater admiration or terror among creation, than monsters, prodigies, and abominations, in which we see the works of nature not only made absurd, turned topsy-turvy, mutilated and deformed: but (more importantly) we discover in them more often a secret judgment and scourge of the ire of God, Who, through the things which are made manifest, makes us sense the violence of His bitter justice, so that we are forced to look into ourselves, strike our consciences as with a hammer, examine our vices, and hold in horror our misdeeds. . . .⁶¹

Boaistuau's *Histoires prodigieuses* was a popular work with a complicated publication history. The first edition appeared in Paris in 1560. It consisted of forty-one chapters of various lengths relating prodigies and illustrative exempla to moral lessons. In 1567, Claude de Tesserant reissued Boaistuau's work with an additional fourteen chapters. In 1571, the historian François de Belleforest again published the Tesserant sequel with yet another addition of ten chapters that he himself authored. Still other editions with added sections appeared in 1582 and 1598. The *Histoires prodigieuses* was published twenty-two times in French, seven times in Dutch, twice in Spanish, and once in English. The French version of 1567 included neither an illustration nor a discussion of the Roman monster.⁶²

In Fenton's translation of 1569, however, one finds an illustration and a description of the monstrosity. These come at the end of chapter 40, which is entitled "A wonderfull Historie of Couetousness, with many examples touching that matter worthy of memory." The chapter begins with the moralizing comment,

61. Translated in Smith, "Loathly Births off Nature," 160.

62. For discussions of Boaistuau and his *Histoires prodigieuses*, see Smith, "Loathly Births off Nature," 156–61; Schenda, *Die französische Prodigienliteratur*, 26–40; and Carr, *Pierre Boaistuau's Histoires Tragiques*, 21–27, 211–17.

. . . there is no other talke in our commonweals of any thing but only the burning rage of couetousnesse, wych raigneth in all ye estates of ye world, namely amongst ye Ecclesiastical persons, as our high father with his Cardinals, a thing much to be lamented, considering that they ought to be rather distributors of the goods, of the Lord, than affectionated & burning as we see wt this gréedie desire of riches, yt it seems yt they would drain al the welth of ye world into theyr gulphs, & in ye end burie the same wt their bodies in the graue.⁶³

Boaistuau concluded his fortieth chapter with the story of the monster of Ravenna, a one-legged, horned, armless, bat-winged hermaphrodite with an eye in its knee and a talon for its foot. The creature was said to represent ambition, covetousness, greed, and sodomy—sins that supposedly led to the wars between Pope Julius II and King Louis XII of France. Following the section on the monster of Ravenna, Fenton turns to a detailed description of the Roman monster and provides a woodcut illustration. He adds no further explanatory or interpretive comments for the reader's edification. However, by situating his insertion in a chapter on avarice, immediately following a story critical of the warrior pope, Julius II, Fenton leads the reader to associate the Roman monster with events involving the corrupt Renaissance papacy.

The Roman Monster in the Polemics of the French Wars of Religion

Wonder-books remained quite popular among German Lutherans during the latter half of the sixteenth century, but after the Religious Peace of Augsburg (1555), religious polemics somewhat abated within the Empire. As open religious warfare was ending in Germany it was about to begin in France. The polemics that accompanied the spread of Protestantism to France provided an opportunity for new interpretations of the Roman monster. In 1570, Arnaud Sorbin published his *Tractatus de monstis* (Paris, 1570), a wonder-book that was much more stridently polemical than any of the other examples we have looked at. Rudolf Schenda categorizes Sorbin as a follower of Boaistuau; this may be correct, but it obscures a major difference.⁶⁴ Boaistuau was a moralist and storyteller; Sorbin was a polemicist, passionately committed to the suppression of "heresy." In his chapter on the Roman monster, it is clear that he is

63. Fenton, *Certaine Secrete wonders*, 138r.

64. Schenda, *Die französische Prodigienliteratur*, 77–79.

much more interested in opposing Protestantism than in following Boaistuau's example of deducing general moral meanings from prodigious occurrences.

Born in 1532, Sorbin became a court preacher for Charles IX at the young age of thirty-five. He later held this same position for Henry III and Henry IV. In 1578 he was appointed bishop of Nevers. Equally committed to the French monarchy and to French Catholicism, Sorbin was a tireless defender of both causes.⁶⁵ For example, in 1574 he published a justification of the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre and of Charles IX's role in it.⁶⁶ He argued that, in the preservation of their states, kings are allowed to use the authority God has given them to chastise and slay rebels.⁶⁷ Sorbin has been called "among the most violently partisan royalists in an age of violent polemic."⁶⁸ In Sorbin's view, Protestantism amounted to a reappearance of former heresies—Arians, Adamites, Albigensians, etc. In this, he reflected the attitudes of other French anti-Huguenot controversialists who wrote in the vernacular.⁶⁹

The *Tractatus de monstris* consists of fourteen chapters; chapter 10 treats the Roman monster. Each chapter begins with a woodcut illustration and ends with an *oratio*, or prayer. François de Belleforest translated nine of Sorbin's fourteen chapters into French, leaving out the concluding prayers. The French translation appeared in print in 1582; in it, the Roman monster appears in chapter 8.⁷⁰

The illustration of the Roman monster that introduces Sorbin's chapter is quite different from the versions that appeared in the works of Lycosthenes, Batman, and Fenton (see fig. 10). Here the monster faces right with its right arm/elephant's foot facing the viewer. The ass's ears are laid back, creating a menacing appearance. The dragon's head on the creature's backside is spewing forth a huge plume of fire and smoke; the naked female breasts and pudendum are shaded and obscured. The background shows buildings on one side of the monster and a palm tree on the other. Nothing in the background sug-

65. Wilson and Moss, "Portents, Prophecy, and Poetry," 167. On Sorbin, see Robert Barroux, "Sorbin, Arnaud," in *Dictionnaire des lettres françaises*.

66. Arnaud Sorbin, *Le vray Resveille-matin des Calvinistes, et Publicains François: Où est amplement discouru de l'auctorité des princes, & du devoir des suiets envers iceux* (Paris, 1575).

67. Anglo, *Machiavelli—The First Century*, 266.

68. Ibid.

69. Sypher, "Faisant ce qu'il leur vient à plaisir," 68. Sorbin had made the connection between Albigensianism and Protestantism in the 1560s. See Racaut, "Polemical Use of the Albigensian Crusade," 272–73.

70. Schenda, *Die französische Prodigenliteratur*, 77.

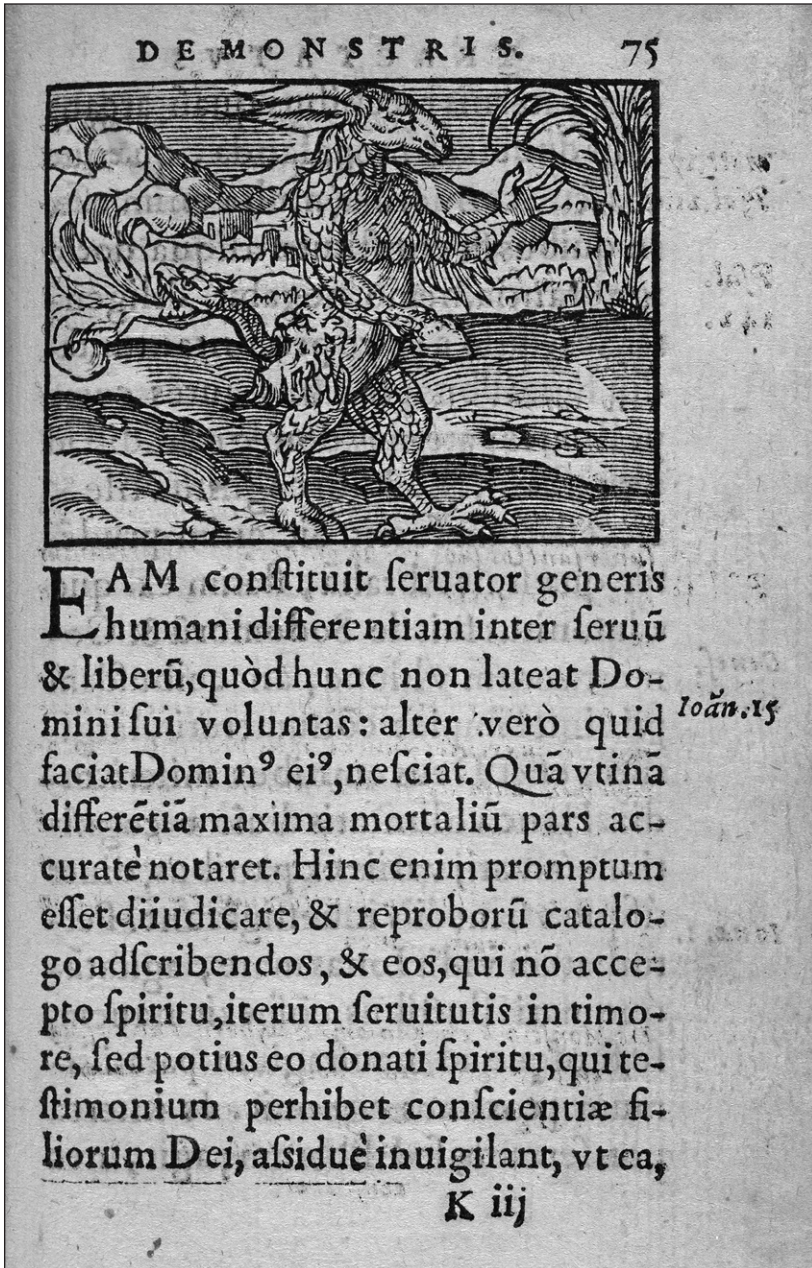


Figure 10: Roman monster from Arnaud Sorbin's *Tractatus de monstis* (1570). Courtesy of the Rare Book & Manuscript Library, University of Pennsylvania.

gests the city of Rome. The monster stands on the shore of a river with the buildings and the tree on the opposite shore.⁷¹

Sorbin wrote *Tractatus de monstis* in the midst of the French wars of religion, an extended period of hostilities punctuated by unenforceable peace agreements.⁷² The book appeared during the third civil war (1568–70), which saw an expansion of the conflict as French Protestants gained the support of allies from Holland and Germany. At the same time open military hostilities were underway, there was also an active pamphlet warfare going on between the Huguenots, still often referred to as Lutherans,⁷³ and the defenders of traditional Roman Catholicism. Unlike their German Catholic counterparts in the early years of the Reformation, the French Catholic pamphleteers were quite successful in making their case to the lay public through vernacular polemics. These controversialists developed a number of themes or lines of attack against the Protestants, some of which Sorbin included in his own work. In *Hatred in Print*, Luc Racaut describes Catholic French vernacular propaganda against the Huguenots. Their critics charged that the Huguenots were morally depraved and indulged in sexual promiscuity, sodomy, incest, and infanticide; that they were dangerous agitators, rebels, conspirators, and sedition mongers who brought divisiveness and chaos; that they were sectarian reincarnations of ancient or medieval heresies rather than religious reformers; and that they were bestial and monstrous in their treatment of others. This list, though not exhaustive, suggests the level of acrimony to be found in the French vernacular controversial literature during the wars of religion.⁷⁴

Sorbin's chapter on the Roman monster reflects many of these anti-Protestant sentiments, while presenting a Catholic counterinterpretation of the creature. Melanchthon's *The Pope-Ass Explained* appeared in a French translation as part of *De deux monstres prodigieux* in 1557. Sorbin does not respond directly to Melanchthon's antipapal arguments. Rather he constructs an interpretation that contrasts Protestant sectarian divisiveness with Catholic unity, harmony, and peace; demonizes Protestants as instigators of war, pillaging, and rebellion; denigrates them as Adamites and newfangled Arians; urges Catholics not to debate scripture with them; and ends in a scatological attack against all followers of Luther.

71. Sorbin, *Tractatus de monstis*, 75r.

72. Holt, *French Wars of Religion*, 56.

73. Gray, "Origin of the Word Huguenot," 353; Racaut, *Hatred in Print*, 353.

74. Racaut, *Hatred in Print*, esp. chaps. 4–7.

He begins with a theme he derives from Aristotle's *Generation of Animals*, in which Aristotle asserts that the ass is an animal "of a cold nature" whose semen is frigid. As proof, Aristotle states, "if a horse mount a female already impregnated by an ass he does not destroy the impregnation of the ass, but if the ass be the second to mount her he does destroy that of the horse because of the coldness of his own semen."⁷⁵ Sorbin uses this passage as the starting point for a rather forced metaphor in which the coldness of the ass and the frigidity of its semen stand for the heretical teachings of Luther and his successors. (In context, it is clear that Sorbin uses the term "Lutheran" to mean French Protestants or Huguenots.) He argues that, among the "Lutheran" heretics, "charitas" [*sic*] is frozen. This accounts for their savage, monstrous behavior. They ignore their parents when they are powerless and nearly dead from famine. In satisfying their own cupidity, they spare neither their country, nor their friends, nor their parents. Indeed, they are responsible for the death of their parents.⁷⁶ France was indeed suffering from a severe famine when Sorbin was writing this tract. He blames the scarcity of food on the donkey's sterility (i.e., Protestantism).⁷⁷ In the prayer at the end of the chapter, he returns to the theme of asinine frigidity with the comment, "Behold, so much cold of the seed of the ass harasses us."⁷⁸

Sorbin's use of the ejaculate of an ass as a metaphor for Protestants in France is, at best, strained, as the following quotation illustrates:

The head of this monster was an ass's head. This animal, because it is the coldest, is weighed down by the utmost sloth. For it is so cold that its semen, ejaculated prematurely without stimulation, loses its power of procreation. Instead, its semen, arriving later, blocks the nature and effect of others. For what could be colder, or what more slothful, than Luther and his successors? When was *charitas* more frozen? From where, pray tell, came the seeds of war, if not from the workshop of Luther and his followers? . . . Pillaging of the temples of France, plundering of cities, selling some people into slavery, and tearing others to pieces and slaughtering

75. Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, bk. 2, sec. 8, 748a.24–748b.7, in *Complete Works*, ed. Barnes, 1:1160.

76. Sorbin, *Tractatus de monstis*, 78r–78v.

77. Ibid., 79v. For the famine in France during the 1560s, see Diefendorf, "Prologue to a Massacre," 1082–83; and Diefendorf, *Beneath the Cross*, 74–75.

78. Sorbin, *Tractatus de monstis*, 88r.

them by the cruelest execution—these will be the clearest witness that the *charitas* among heretics is frozen for ever.⁷⁹

Continuing with the theme of monstrosity, Sorbin associates the chimerical anatomy of the monster with a degradation of human morals. His treatment of the monster's body parts, however, is far less comprehensive than Melanchthon's. The creature's talon stands for robbery and rapine; its bovine foot represents pleasures; the female belly and breasts denote female lusts;⁸⁰ the scales on the monster's body are the covering of the body of Satan. They stand for the kings and princes who support the heretics.⁸¹

Asinine frigidity and anatomical symbolism are not the only themes in Sorbin's explication. Like the vernacular propaganda, he denigrates the Protestants by associating them with ancient and medieval heresies, and he conflates this theme with charges of sexual promiscuity and moral depravity. Specifically, he relates the Protestants to the Adamites and the Arians.

The Adamites, mentioned by St. Epiphanius,⁸² were an ancient Christian sect whose members practiced nudity to symbolize their return to a state of primitive innocence like that of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Sorbin's reference, however, also conjures up images of the Adamite sect of Hussite Taborites, made infamous by Aeneas Sylvius (Pope Pius II) in a chapter of his *Historia Bohemica* (1458). These Czech religious anarchists rejected original sin, practiced ritual nudism, and taught that there should be no curb on sexual desire. Sorbin's reference to the Adamites is calculated to alarm his readers: "Who does not know that the impieties of the Adamites grew hot with passion? They often gathered together naked at night to fornicate and satisfy their wantonness."⁸³

Sorbin conflates the Adamites with the Arians, a much more famous ancient heretical group that denied the divinity of Jesus. For them, "the Son of God was not eternal but created by the Father from nothing as an instrument for the creation of the world."⁸⁴ The Arian heresy gave rise to a controversy in the Alexandrian church between the presbyter Arius and the Bishop Athana-

79. Ibid., 77v–78r.

80. Ibid., 80v.

81. Ibid., 82r–82v.

82. Epiphanius, *Panarion*, sec. 4, chap. 52, trans. Williams, 67–70.

83. Sorbin, *Tractatus de monstis*, 80v. On the Adamites, see Kaminsky, *History of the Hussite Revolution*, 355, 429–31; and Heymann, *John Žižka and the Hussite Revolution*, 213, 261–62.

84. *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, s.v. "Arianism."

sus. It also resulted in the calling of the first general council of the Christian church, the Council of Nicaea, where the orthodox statement of the doctrine of the Trinity was agreed upon.

In calling the Calvinists Arians, Sorbin associates them with one of the most infamous and hated sects of antiquity. Rhetorically, his intent is to reduce the Huguenots from religious reformers to heretical “deformers,”⁸⁵ who not only pervert orthodox doctrine but also indulge in gross immorality. Like Arians, the Calvinists seem to be charming and simple and promise eternal life, peace, and mercy, yet they produce wars, rebellions, sacrileges, thefts, murders, promiscuity, adultery, and fornication.⁸⁶ Also, Sorbin compares the dour appearance of Calvinist ministers with Epiphanius’s description of Arius:

There are people, for they are such Demeas,⁸⁷ who are so moved by a wrinkled and ministerial face and a gloomy and lean appearance that, whenever they see such a man tossing around the smallest Pauline words and the name of Christ, they immediately think that the sanctity of Paul and Christ is present. But who does not know that this cleverness actually was typical of Arius himself? May whoever wishes listen to Epiphanius, who describes in a few words the face, words, and appearance of the man: Arius was very tall, a bit grim, and shaped like a deceitful serpent who could deceive every blameless heart with his treacherous cloak, for he always wore half a *pallium* and a *stola*. He was charming in conversation, always persuading and flattering souls. . . . [H]is venom reached all the way to bishops. These things Epiphanius reports. Let everyone, even the blind, judge how clearly he exposes not only the pretended sanctity of Arius, but also [that] of these modern Arians and Calvinists.⁸⁸

Sorbin makes many allegations against the Huguenots, but he does not enter into any substantive discussion of points of doctrinal disagreement. In fact, he asserts that it is useless to debate doctrine with a heretic:

We see . . . that once the seed of heretical depravity has been implanted into the hearts of men, scarcely can it be extinguished. For it is agreed that this is what the Apostle meant in saying, “The speech of heretics crawls like a cancer.” And, as vinegar is more easily made from the purest wine than

85. In his *Histoire des Albigeois* (Paris, 1569), Sorbin referred to the Calvinists as “our modern deformed.” See Racaut, *Hatred in Print*, 43.

86. Sorbin, *Tractatus de monstis*, 85v–86r.

87. Demea is the grouchy father in Terence’s play *Adelphi*.

88. Sorbin, *Tractatus de monstis*, 85r–85v.

wine is made from vinegar, so a heretic is much more easily made from a true Christian than a Christian is made from a heretic. For this reason, Tertullian especially forbids that anyone dare to debate with heretics about sacred scripture, pointing out both with what difficulty they are dragged to repentance and how dangerous it is to debate with them.⁸⁹

For Sorbin, the Huguenots are not only doctrinally erroneous and morally depraved, but they are also guilty of sedition. They are the fulfillment of Christ's prediction (Matth. 24:5–6) that seducers would come in his name and that there would be "wars and rumors of wars."⁹⁰ Protestant princes who join together in an "impious unity of heretics" are guilty of a conspiracy greater than that of the Catilines.⁹¹ Sorbin laments that German Protestants are joining with the French "Lutherans,"⁹² and he asserts that those who join the Protestants are people who pursue private honors at the expense of the common good.⁹³ In his view, the Calvinists cause disagreements, wars, rebellions, sacrileges, thefts, and murders.⁹⁴

Sorbin ends his chapter with a scatological peroration in which he returns to the monster's discovery in Rome and its relationship to Luther. Taking liberty with the chronology of events he states,

Behold how aptly this monster, which appeared at Rome in the time of Luther, depicts his appearance. For it was showing that a man had been born to oppose the Roman Church with his back parts, although not immediately attacking it, and to tend a fire of such a blaze of ministers, whom his corrupting feces would produce (just as many creatures are born from cow dung), and purposely to serve impious men. And so the filthy seat of Luther's privy has brought forth such fruit for us: it has produced such excrement, so many feces, and so many sources of corruption. Even if men keep silent about all of these things, this is what the very stones of the ruined temples will shout.⁹⁵

89. *Ibid.*, 80r–80v.

90. *Ibid.*, 79r.

91. *Ibid.*, 82v.

92. *Ibid.*, 82v–83r.

93. *Ibid.*, 83r. Note that John Barthlet used this same argument against the Catholic controversialists. See below, p. 199.

94. *Ibid.*, 85v–86r.

95. *Ibid.*, 87r–v.

Sorbin concludes, "There is no need to introduce another truth recently born from Luther and Calvin, as if born from the head of Jupiter, over and above the already manifested light of the Catholic truth."⁹⁶

The Roman Monster in the Elizabethan Reformation: *The Pedegrewe of Heretiques*

The restoration of Protestantism in Elizabethan England brought written conflict between proponents of the new religious settlement and defenders of traditional Catholicism. In this context, the Roman monster again served the polemical purposes of the Reformation. In less than a year after Elizabeth's succession to the throne (1558), Parliament passed the Act of Supremacy and the Act of Uniformity, and Elizabeth issued a series of royal injunctions to implement the changes to Protestantism. Numerous Protestant and Catholic controversial writings accompanied the early years of the Elizabethan religious settlement. During the period from 1560 to 1570, the so-called Great Controversy was the occasion for more than sixty such polemical or apologetic works.⁹⁷ One of these was John Barthlet's *The Pedegrewe of Heretiques* (1566), in which he addressed the writings of three Continental Counter-Reformation authors and their English expatriate Catholic translators. In his book, Barthlet made use of the Roman monster in a powerful concluding chapter.

Just as a few hundred Protestants had sought refuge on the Continent during the reign of Queen Mary, so under Queen Elizabeth a number of Catholic scholars and gentry established themselves abroad in various towns in northern France and the Spanish Netherlands. During the 1560s, Louvain emerged as the most important center for Catholic opposition to English Protestantism. Here Catholic scholars from Oxford and Cambridge began lecturing and publishing, making their case against Protestantism. The leader of these expatriates was Nicholas Sander (1530?–1581), a professor of canon law from Oxford who authored a number of works defending the Roman interpretation of the Eucharist, supporting papal claims to primacy over the church, and characterizing the English Reformation as the Anglican schism. He was also the first of the refugees to call for a foreign invasion to restore Catholicism in England.⁹⁸ Altogether more than twenty men made up this

96. Ibid., 88v.

97. Southern, *Elizabethan Recusant Prose*, 60–67. Southern coined the term "Great Controversy" to describe this polemical literary exchange.

98. McGrath, *Papists and Puritans*, 61; Southern, *Elizabethan Recusant Prose*, 94–100.

Louvain school. They produced a large body of publications; Nicholas Sander estimated that approximately twenty thousand copies of works by the exiles were smuggled into England before 1580.⁹⁹ In 1565, the bishop of Salisbury, John Jewel, wrote to Heinrich Bullinger in Zurich stating, “The popish exiles are disturbing us and giving us all the trouble in their power.”¹⁰⁰

Bishop Jewel (1522–71) was one of the most important intellectual leaders of the Elizabethan Protestants during the 1560s. He was Oxford educated, a friend of the Continental reformer Peter Martyr Vermigli, and a former Marian exile. With Elizabeth’s accession, he returned to England; in January 1560, he was consecrated as the bishop of Salisbury.¹⁰¹ On November 26, 1559, he preached what has come to be known as his Challenge Sermon at St. Paul’s Cross. He was invited to preach it again at court on March 17, 1560. And he preached it a third time, again at St. Paul’s Cross, on March 31, 1560. This sermon became the occasion for a “vast corpus of apologetic and controversial writing.”¹⁰² Jewel challenged the defenders of traditional Roman Catholicism to prove the antiquity of a number of their beliefs and practices:

If any learned man of all oure aduersaryes, or if all the learned mē that be aliue be hable to brīg, any one sufficient sentence, oute of any olde catholique doctour, or father: Or oute of any olde generall counsell: Or out of the holye scriptures of God: Or ani one example of the primitiue Church, whereby it may be clearly & plainly proued, that there was ani priuate masse in the whole world at that tyme, for the space of sixe hūdred yeares after Christ: Or that there was then ani Communion ministered vnto the people vnder one kind: Or that, the people had their commen prayers then in a straunge tonge that they vnderstoode not: Or that the Bishop of Rome was then called, an vniuersall Byshop, or the head of the vnyuersall Church: Or that, the people was then taught to beleue that Christes body is really, substantially, corporally, carnally or naturally in the sacramente . . . I promised then yt [that] I would geue ouer and subscribe vnto hym.¹⁰³

99. McGrath, *Papists and Puritans*, 63.

100. Robinson, *Zurich Letters*, 138.

101. Southgate, *John Jewel and the Problem of Doctrinal Authority*, 15–40.

102. Ibid., 50. See Southern, *Elizabethan Recusant Prose*, 61–66 for a list of the works associated with the Great Controversy.

103. Ibid., 60.

The Catholic expatriates at Louvain rose to the challenge. Over the next twenty years the opponents and defenders of the Elizabethan religious settlement issued sixty-four publications with titles such as *Answer*, *Apology*, *Confutation*, *Reply*, *Defence*, etc. The most famous of these publications was Jewel's *Apologia ecclesiae Anglicanae* (*The Apology of the Church of England*, 1562), a work that set forth the main tenants of the Anglican faith and argued for the historic catholicity of these beliefs. Numerous English scholars and clerics joined Jewel in defense of the religious settlement. One of these was John Barthlet, author of *The Pedegrewe of Heretiques*.

An Anglican cleric with Calvinist leanings, Barthlet was a vicar of Stortford, Essex, a fellow of Jesus College, Cambridge, and a divinity lecturer of St. Giles's, Cripplegate.¹⁰⁴ He dedicated his polemical *Pedegrewe* to Robert Dudley, the Earl of Leicester. In a brief and incomplete reference in the introduction, he indicated the authors and translators against whom he was writing: "As in this matter of heresies, by Hosius, Shackelock, Rurimondes Euans, Staphilus his Stapleton. etc."¹⁰⁵ These references, unclear to the modern reader, refer to three works that were published in Antwerp in 1565 as part of the Great Controversy: Richard Shacklock's translation of Stanislaus Hosius's *De origine haeresium nostri temporis*, entitled by the translator *The Hatchet of Heresies*; Lewis Evans's translation of *Tabulae Grassantium passim Haereseôn anasceuasticae, atque analyticae* by William Lindanus, bishop of Roermond, which Evans entitled *The betraing of the beastlines of heretykes*; and Thomas Stapleton's translation of Fridericus Staphylus's *Apologie*. In countering the translations and commentaries of Shacklock, Evans, and Stapleton, Barthlet not only addressed their content, but he also responded to the illustrations that accompanied the works of Stapleton/Staphylus and Shacklock/Hosius with an elaborate illustration of his own, placed at the end of the *Pedegrewe*.¹⁰⁶

A brief review of the authors and translators will help place Barthlet's book in context. Richard Shacklock was an English Catholic who was active in mid-century, though his exact birth and death dates are not known. He studied at Trinity College, Cambridge, where he received both his bachelor's and master's

104. These biographical details assume that the John Barthlet who authored *The Pedegrewe* and the John Barthlet who attended Cambridge and served at Stortford and St. Giles were the same person. See *DNB*, s.v. "Barthlet, John"; Venn and Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses*, 1.1:99; Greaves, *Society and Religion in Elizabethan England*, 306; Rosenberg, *Leicester*, 211–12.

105. Barthlet, *Pedegrewe of Heretiques* (1566), 1v.

106. Rosenberg, *Leicester*, 211.

degrees. Shortly after Elizabeth came to the throne, he left for Louvain, where he continued his studies in civil law.¹⁰⁷ One of the most important publications of the Great Controversy was Shacklock's translation of Hosius's treatise on the origin of Protestantism.

Stanislaus Hosius was a leader of the Catholic Reformation whose reputation rests on his service as diplomat, papal nuncio, and theologian.¹⁰⁸ Born in Cracow and raised in Vilna, he received his bachelor of arts degree from the Jagellonian University in Cracow in 1520 and his doctorate in canon and civil law from the University of Bologna in 1534. He served in administrative positions for the bishop of Cracow and King Sigismund I of Poland. The king arranged for him to receive several benefices, including the bishopric of Ermland (Polish: Warmia) while he was still unordained. Under King Sigismund II Augustus, Hosius became a royal ambassador. Pope Paul IV made him a papal nuncio with responsibilities for planning meetings of the Council of Trent. Ultimately he presided over the last sessions of the council. In addition to his diplomatic career, Hosius's writings contributed to his reputation as a defender of traditional Catholicism. In 1557, he dedicated his treatise on heresies to King Sigismund II. This work, which Shacklock entitled *The Hatchet of Heresies*, critiqued the Lutherans, Zwinglians, Schwenckfeldians, Calvinists, Anabaptists, and Anti-Trinitarians.

Lewis Evans received his bachelor of arts, master of arts, and bachelor of divinity degrees from Oxford. He became one of the Catholic refugees in the Low Countries, where he translated a treatise by William Lindanus. A few years later, after returning to England, he converted to Anglicanism. Thereafter he wrote various works critical of the Roman Church.¹⁰⁹

William Lindanus (Dutch: Van der Lindt) was a Catholic priest who studied philosophy and theology at Louvain, and Greek and Hebrew at Paris. He earned his doctorate at Louvain, served as a royal counselor for Philip II, and in 1562, with Philip's support, became bishop of Roermond, where he began implementing the decrees and reforms of the Council of Trent. He wrote numerous works in Latin and in Dutch, supporting Catholicism and opposing Protestantism.¹¹⁰

107. DNB, s.v. "Shacklock, Richard."

108. Williams, "Stanislaus Hosius."

109. DNB, s.v. "Evans, Lewis."

110. *Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Lindanus (van Linda), William Damasus."

As noted above, Thomas Stapleton was one of the leaders of the Louvain group; he had the reputation as a “bookish recluse”¹¹¹ and “the most learned Roman Catholic of all his time.”¹¹² After refusing to take the Oath of Supremacy, he left for the Continent late in 1559. He became a professor of scripture at the University of Louvain and developed a reputation for both his own polemical works and his English translations of writings by other Catholic controversialists. When he published his translation of Staphylus’s *Apologie*, he added to it his own “Discourse of the Translator vppon the doctrine of the protestants vvhich he trieth by the three first founders and fathers thereof, Martin Luther, Philip Melanchthon, and especially Iohn Caluin.”

Fridericus Staphylus, a Lutheran convert to Catholicism, was a princely counselor and a Catholic controversialist. In 1541 he received his master of arts from the University of Wittenberg. At that point still a Lutheran, he took a position at Königsberg University as a professor of theology, where he came into theological disputes with the Dutch humanist and Protestant Wilhelm Gnapheus, and the Lutheran reformer Andreas Osiander. These clashes may have disillusioned him about the possibility of Protestant unity, for sectarian divisiveness later became a dominant theme in his polemics. Following a serious illness in 1552, he converted to Roman Catholicism and began his career as an adviser to various bishops and princes, including the Duke of Bavaria. He became a leader of the Catholic Reformation in Bavaria and Austria. After his conversion, he wrote works critical of Lutheran theology and Protestant sectarianism; one such work was his *Apologie*.¹¹³

These three continental Catholic controversialists and their English translators made nearly identical points in rebutting Protestantism. They argued that the extreme disunity among the various Protestant sects negated the credibility of their religious message. Further, they asserted that, on numerous doctrinal points, the ideas of the Protestants were little more than a restatement of various ancient heresies—Manichaeans, Cerdonians, Pelagians, Massilians, Selucians, Novatians, Donatists, Nestorians, Arians, Jovinians, Audians, Catharists, Origenists, etc.¹¹⁴ As Thomas Stapleton wrote, the Protestants say they

111. O’Connell, *Thomas Stapleton and the Counter Reformation*, 25.

112. McGrath, *Papists and Puritans*, 60–61.

113. ADB, s.v. “Staphylus, Friedrich”; *New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, s.v. “Staphylus, Friedrich”; *Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Friedrich Staphylus.”

114. Lewis Evans, *Certain Tables sett furth by the right Reuerend father in God, William Bushopp of Rurimunde, in Ghelderland . . .* [entitled by Evans] *The betraing of the beastlines of heretykes* (Antwerp: Aegidius Diest, 1565), Cvi[r]–Dii[v].

want to reform “after the paterne and practice of the primitiue Church,” but what they really mean is “the renewing of such heresies, as were in that time condemned.”¹¹⁵ Similarly, Lewis wrote that Protestants “leane vnto old cancred, and condemned heresies.”¹¹⁶

Hosius and Staphylus presented their arguments about Protestant sectarian division and the heretical ancestry of Protestant theology using a genealogical metaphor. Staphylus, for example, created an elaborate “Table of Lvtther’s Ofspring”¹¹⁷ in which he categorized numerous sectarian splinter groups under the three broad headings of Confessionists,¹¹⁸ Sacramentarians, and Anabaptists. Using this schema he connected a comprehensive list of disparate groups to Luther’s religious ideas. Likewise, Hosius described Luther as the author of numerous Protestant sects—Sacramentarians, Anabaptists, Schwenckfeldians, and Servetians.¹¹⁹ This genealogical metaphor made it easy to associate Luther with many sects that he himself had condemned.

An obvious way to present an intellectual genealogy is with a family tree. Both Hosius and Staphylus made use of such an arboreal metaphor. In the Hosius treatise, the tree of Protestantism appeared as an “eual plant which Sathan hath sowed in God his ground, whose roote is raylyng, whose body is rebellion, whose braunches be bloodshedde, whose leaues be lyes, whose frute be the aples of Atheisme, that is to be of no Religion, or to thynck that there is no God at all”¹²⁰ (fig. 11). Staphylus’s Protestant family tree was far more detailed. The tree’s roots are infested with four toads (demonic symbols), which the text identifies as Thomas Müntzer, Bernhard Rothmann, Andreas Karlstadt, and Philip Melanchthon. Its trunk is formed of Martin Luther, with his wife, Katharina von Bora, at his side. From the central trunk arise three branches, consisting of images of Bernhard Rothmann, Philip Melanchthon,

115. Stapleton, “Discourse of the Translatour vpon the doctrine of the protestants vvhich he trieth by the three first founders and fathers thereof, Martin Luther, Philip Melanchthon, and especially Iohn Calvin,” in Staphylus, *Apologie*, trans. Stapleton, 178v–179r.

116. Evans, *The betraing of the beastlines of heretykes*, Avii[r].

117. Staphylus, *Apologie*, 102r–115r.

118. Confessionists were followers of the Augsburg Confession.

119. Stanislaus Hosius, *A Most Excellent Treatise of the begynnyng of heresyyses in oure tyme . . .* [entitled by Richard Shacklock] *The hatchet of heresies*, trans. Richard Shacklock (Antwerp: Aegidius Diest, 1565), 61v.

120. Hosius, *Hatchet of heresies*, Shacklock’s “Epistle dedicatory” to Queen Elizabeth I, a vi[v]. I thank my former student Mr. Andrew Gatti for calling the arboreal metaphor of Staphylus and Hosius to my attention.



Figure 11: Tree of Protestantism from Stanislaus Hosius's *A Most Excellent Treatise of the begynnnyng of heresyys in oure tyme* (1565). Courtesy of the Rare Book & Manuscript Library, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

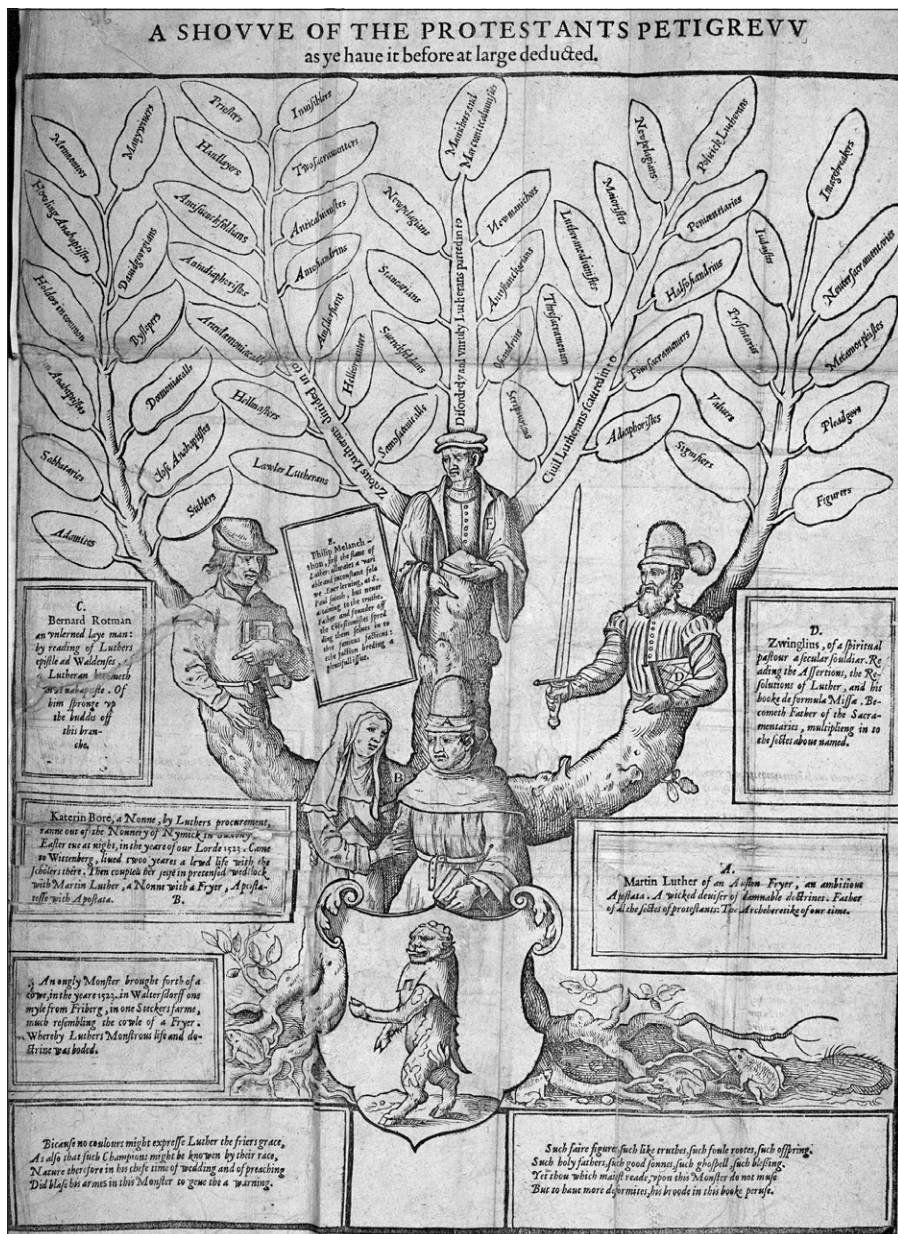


Figure 12: Tree of Protestantism from Fridericus Staphylus's *Apologie* (1565). © The British Library Board, General Reference Collection, 698.d.1.

and Ulrich Zwingli. From these branches grow fifty-two leaves, each labeled with the name of an alleged Protestant sect (fig. 12).

In addition to an arboreal metaphor, Staphylus also used the teratological image of the monk-calf. This was the monstrous deformity that Luther had explicated as a condemnation of monasticism in the pamphlet he published with Melanchthon's *The Pope-Ass Explained*. In the Staphylus illustration, the monk-calf stands in the middle of an escutcheon placed at the base of the tree. To the left of the shield is a caption stating, "an ougly Monster brought forth of a cowe, in the yeare 1523. in Waltersdorff one myle from Friberg, in one Steckers farme, much resembling the cowle of a Fryer. Whereby Luthers Monstrous life and doctrine was boded" (fig. 12).

Staphylus included another important point that helps to explain the structure and argument of the *Pedegrewe*. He dismissed an argument that he attributes to "Smidelin" ("Smithy"), the derisive sobriquet applied to Jakob Andreae, a son of a blacksmith who became a respected Lutheran theologian, princely counselor, and campaigner for Lutheran unity. Staphylus wrote,

But now *Smidelin* findeth an other sory shifte to comferte his poore brethren withal. Bicause in dede he can not denie the heretical schismes that are amonge them, he turneth the blow vppon the Catholikes and chargeth them with the like sayeng. *that amonge the papistes also are sectes and schismes.*¹²¹

The charge of Catholic sectarian divisions, attributed to Jakob Andreae, becomes one of the organizing ideas behind Barthlet's book. He counters the criticism of Protestant sectarian divisiveness and the charge that Protestants are merely ancient heretics reborn by turning the Catholic argument on its head, insisting that historic Catholicism was itself filled with sectarian divisions and heretical movements. Hosius called the pre-Reformation Roman church a unified "land of one lippe."¹²² For Barthlet, the Roman church becomes an institution plagued by heresy and division from the very beginning. In the second part of his treatise he lists 107 separate divisive, sectarian, or heretical groups within Catholicism that he illustrates on the leaves of his accompanying woodcut¹²³ (fig. 13).

121. Staphylus, *Apologie*, 121v.

122. Barthlet, *Pedegrewe of Heretiques*, 3r.

123. Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety*, 151–53, discusses the woodcut that illustrates Barthlet's *Pedegrewe of Heretiques*, although she does not identify it as such. I contend that she both misdates and

In addition to his genealogical pedigree of Catholic heretical divisions, Barthlet also develops a second narrative in which he employs the rhetoric of civic discourse. In this argument, he contrasts the pursuit of private interests on the part of the Catholic controversialists with a defense of the well-being of the English commonweal. It is in this context that he uses the Roman monster as a symbol of the evil, hierocratic, and autocratic hierarchy of the papal church.

He introduces his attack against the subverters of the English comity in the introductory section of the *Pedegrewe*. There he charges that writers such as Shacklock, Evans, and Stapleton “addresse themselues to thencombraunce, both of the common cause and wealth [of England],”¹²⁴ and he describes Shacklock as “hacking at this common wealth.”¹²⁵ He characterizes the defenders of the Anglican religious settlement as “setting forth the truth, and care of the common welth.”¹²⁶ He asks, “what hath Hosius, being an alien, and ignoraunte of our Land, I pray you, to doe with Trinitie Colledge in Cambridge.”¹²⁷ This civic argument allows Barthlet to present his entire “family tree” of heresies both as a discussion of sectarian divisions within Catholicism and as a commentary on the structure and power of the papal church. For example, the ambition of Simon Magus and the covetousness of Judas Iscariot comprise the roots of Barthlet’s Catholic tree (fig. 13). The trunk consists of the bodies of Gratian and Peter Lombard, representing canon law and Scholasticism, which form the legal and theological bases for the church’s claims of authority. From this double trunk spring branches and leaves labeled with heresies and sectarian divisions. Crowning the tree top stands the Roman monster, “a thing wherein the horrible confusion of Rome, is sufficiently and properly preached, and contayned in a little summe.”¹²⁸ Barthlet thus concludes his defense of the Elizabethan Protestant religious settlement by attacking the

misinterprets the illustration that she calls the “Catholic tree.” She asserts that the image must be dated after 1579, the year in which an English translation of Melancthon’s *The Pope-Ass Explained* was published. She does not appear to be aware that the woodcut in question illustrates Barthlet’s arguments point by point, and she does not connect it to Barthlet or the Great Controversy. She asserts that the “woodblock may have been obtained from abroad; the publisher manipulating the meaning of the image with his choice of English captions.” My interpretation differs substantially from that of Dr. Watt.

124. Barthlet, *Pedegrewe of Heretiques*, 1v.

125. *Ibid.*, 2r.

126. *Ibid.*, 1v.

127. *Ibid.*

128. *Ibid.*, 85r–v.

powerful papal regime through a politically oriented interpretation of the monster's body parts.

He begins with the assertion that the arrival of the monster on the banks of the Tiber indicates that the portent "doth appertayne both onley to Rome, and also signifieth a body politique, risen in that cuntrey, to a maruellous and most horrible confusenesse,"¹²⁹ namely, the church of Antichrist wherein the sons of Adam are daily misshapen "into the societie of the mysticall body of sinne and perdition."¹³⁰ In other words, Barthlet calls the church of Rome the mystical body of Antichrist (see chapter 3 above).

The head of the beast stands for the "Asselike instruction (that is) doctrine worldly, carnall, foolish, slouthfull, wanton, and gentyle [i.e., pagan]," the same as is found in the church of Rome.¹³¹ The neck signifies the proud and stubborn minds of Catholics who embrace blind errors.¹³² The scales stand for the friends and allies who defend the "pope and his members."¹³³ The breasts, stomach, and belly signify cardinals, priests, and "religious rabblement." Specifically, the two breasts stand for the works of Lombard and Gratian, which provide nurture and food for the clergy.¹³⁴ The right hand, an elephant's foot, "must signifie the deedes of that mysticall body politique [of the Roman church], being mighty, cruel, sturdy, stubborne, presuming vpon, winning and conquering all men, not easily yelding ouer the aduauntage gotten. And in that, that is the right hande: it muste signifie their cleargie, and Canons."¹³⁵ The left hand is the civil power and sovereignty that the Roman church holds over the laity. The fact that the left hand is human in form bespeaks a "lefte faythgiuer, promise breaker, and dissembler."¹³⁶

The right foot in the form of the foot of an ox "doth signifie their simple and doting Portifarie priestes, Charterers, Soulemongers, and such like, their Nuns, Sisters, Anchoresses, and the reste, Pardone preachers, Ghostly fathers, Decretaries, and Summistes with an infinite rabblement of Idiotes."¹³⁷ The left

129. Ibid., 85v. For a discussion of the topic of the papal Antichrist in late Tudor and Stuart England, see Milton, *Catholic and Reformed*, 93–127.

130. Barthlet, *Pedegrewe of Heretiques*, 86r.

131. Ibid.

132. Ibid.

133. Ibid., 86v.

134. Ibid.

135. Ibid., 87r.

136. Ibid., 87v.

137. Ibid., 87v–88r. Note: breviary priests, Carthusians, traffickers in intercessory prayers or masses, pardon-

foot “is the foote of a Griphon,” which “signifieth those that in that body politique . . . [who] are gatherers, rakers together, Extortioners and greedy guttes. Such as their Bullistes, Dataries, Copistes, Somners, Notaries and the like.”¹³⁸ The tail signifies “flattering, and false preaching Prophets, teachers and writers,”¹³⁹ and the dragon’s head at the end of the tail stands for “wicked and bloudthristie persones” who use carnal and natural reason, flattery, and tyranny in their attempts to overcome the elect.¹⁴⁰

Barthlet’s “Of the toppe of the Tree” is quite similar to Melanchthon’s *The Pope-Ass Explained*; both critique the institutions of the papacy and the Catholic clerical hierarchy. Melanchthon’s tract, however, reflects issues relevant to religious debate in Germany during the 1520s, while Barthlet’s chapter, a section of a larger work, is part of his defense of the Elizabethan Religious Settlement of the 1560s. Although the body parts of the Roman monster receive somewhat similar interpretations, there are differences of emphasis and terminology. Melanchthon uses language that addresses ecclesiology, clerical concupiscence, and papal condemnation of Lutheranism; Barthlet, on the other hand, uses a political vocabulary, referring to the English polity, the mystical body politic (of the Antichrist), exploitative ecclesiastical bureaucrats, and the tyranny of papal supporters. For example, Melanchthon criticizes papal claims to be the *caput ecclesiae* and the Vicar of Christ on Earth. Barthlet, in contrast, focuses on the misdeeds of the mystical body politic of the Roman church. For Melanchthon, the monster’s right hand stands for the theology of meritorious works and the institutions that theology produces; for Barthlet, the right hand stands for “the grievous misgovernment” of the Roman clergy. Melanchthon interprets the dragon’s head spewing out fire as representing detestable papal bulls and slanderous books of papal supporters. Barthlet sees the dragon’s head as standing for diabolical tyrants who attempt to destroy the elect.

It seems clear that Barthlet had read Melanchthon’s tract; while he generally followed its conclusions, he modified his interpretations to fit the circumstances of England. The fact that he chose a metaphorical explanation of the Roman monster as the conclusion of his defense of the Elizabethan settlement demonstrates the enduring symbolic power and persuasiveness of

ers, fathers confessor, decretalists, and authors of summas.

138. Ibid., 88r.

139. Ibid., 88v.

140. Ibid., 89r.

this ominous chimera. Just as Melanchthon appropriated the Roman monster to defend Lutheranism in the 1520s, so Barthlet likewise deployed it in his defense of English Protestantism in the 1560s.

The Roman Monster in the Elizabethan Reformation: *Of two VVoonderful Popish Monsters: A Declaration of the Monstrous figure of a Popish Asse*

In 1579, the Roman monster again appeared in England, in the context of and as a response to a resurgence of Roman Catholicism. During the decade prior to the publication of an English translation of Melanchthon's tract, tensions between Protestants and Catholics heightened on a number of fronts, as proponents for restoration of Catholicism in England argued in favor of papal jurisdictional authority, asserted Mary Stuart's right to the throne, schemed to organize military action against England, and undertook missionary efforts to keep English Catholicism alive and strong. During the same period, the massacres of Protestants in France and the Low Countries demonstrated the dangers inherent in the Catholic resurgence. In reporting the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacres and the sack of Antwerp to the English audience, a genre of writing developed that is known as "alarum literature."¹⁴¹ The prolegomenon to the English translation of Melanchthon's pamphlet consists of introductions by the translator, John Brooke, and the French publisher, Jean Crespin. The content of this prefatory material is very much like that of other examples of alarum writing. One may therefore view the 1579 English translation as both a general response to the Catholic resurgence during the 1570s and as a specific example of alarum literature.

To explain why Elizabethan Protestants perceived a heightened Catholic threat, this section will consider the Louvainist championing of papal supremacy, the Catholic advocacy of Mary Stuart's dynastic claims, the arrival of the Douai missionary priests in England, the papal excommunication of Elizabeth, the Ridolfi Plot, the St. Bartholomew Day's Massacres, and the sack of Antwerp. As A. G. Dickens has noted, Elizabethans believed that these events were part of a "well-integrated plan organized from Rome."¹⁴² These domestic and international events form the context and help account for the

141. Buchanan, "Massacre of St. Bartholomew's . . . and the Sack of Antwerp," 188, 199; Pratt, "Antwerp and the Elizabethan Mind," 53–54.

142. Dickens, "Elizabethans and St. Bartholomew," 67.

timing of the translation entitled *A Declaration of the Monstrous figure of a Popish Asse* (1579).

As discussed above, Melancthon's pamphlet directly attacked claims of papal supremacy. Several of the Louvainist authors wrote tracts supporting papal primacy and political power, and attacking royal supremacy over the English church. One such writer was the de facto leader of the Louvainists, Nicholas Sander. In 1567, he published *The Rocke of / the Church / Wherein the Primacy of St. Peter and / of his Successours the Bishops / of Rome is proued . . .*¹⁴³ Thomas Harding, a Hebrew scholar and one of Sander's assistants, wrote two works addressing this topic: *A Confutation / of a Booke intituled / An Apologie of the / Church of England . . .* (1565), which was an answer to Bishop Jewel's *Apologia*; and *A Detection of sun-/drie foule errours, lies, / sclaunders, corruptions, and other / false dealings, touching Doctrine, and other matters, vt/tered and practized by M. Iewel . . .* (1568). To these one can add another response to Jewel by John Rastell, a leading Louvain controversialist, entitled *A confutation / of a sermon, pronouced by M. Iuell, / at Paules crosse . . .* (1564). Both Harding and Rastell argued that the pope's power was superior to that of kings and emperors, that he wielded the spiritual sword directly, and that secular rulers wielded the temporal sword at his direction.¹⁴⁴ As part of a dispute unrelated to the Great Controversy, Thomas Stapleton authored a treatise of more than one thousand pages in which he likewise addressed claims of papal authority. The occasion was a dispute over the abbot of Westminster's refusal to swear the Oath of Supremacy. The title of Stapleton's magnum opus reads (in part) *A Counterblast to / M. Hornes vayne / blast against M. / Feckenham. Wherein is set / forthe: a ful Reply to M. Hornes Answer . . . Prouing the Popes and*

143. Southern, *Elizabethan Recusant Prose*, 65, 98, 488; Holmes, *Resistance and Compromise*, 27–28.

144. Ibid., 19. Both Harding and Rastell used the medieval analogy of the "two great lights," in which the sun stands for the pope and the moon for temporal authority. Both Innocent III and Boniface VIII used this argument. As Innocent wrote in his letter "Sicut universitatis conditor," "Thus, as the moon receives its light from the sun and for this very reason is inferior both in quantity and in quality, in its size and in its effect, so the royal power derives the splendor of its dignity from the pontifical authority"; Ehler and Morrall, *Church and State*, 73. Harding and Rastell also used St. Bernard's theory of the "two swords," in which one sword stands for papal spiritual power over the church and the other stands for the material jurisdiction of secular rulers, exercised at the behest of the pope. As St. Bernard wrote, "Both swords, that is, the spiritual and the material, belong to . . . the Church . . . ; however, the latter is to be drawn *for* the Church, and the former *by* the Church." See Cassell, *Monarchia Controversy*, 97. For the "two great lights," see *ibid.*, 86–90; for the theory of the "two swords," see *ibid.*, 96–98. See also Cassell, "Luna est ecclesia," 1–26.

Supremacy in Ecclesiasti-/cal causes: and Disproving the Princes Supremacy / in the same Causes . . . (1567).¹⁴⁵

Other authors wrote in support of Mary Stuart, the Catholic heir to the English crown. In 1571, John Leslie, bishop of Ross, counselor to Mary and her official ambassador to the English court, argued in favor of the legitimacy of Mary's claim to the throne. Detained in England under house arrest, Mary was the hope of the Counter-Reformation for the restoration of the Roman Catholic Church in England should Elizabeth die childless or be forcibly overthrown. A defense of Mary's dynastic claims, when coupled with a challenge to Elizabeth's legitimacy, posed a serious threat to the government. In his *A treatise / concerning / the Defence of the / Honour of the Right / High, Mightie and Noble Prin/cesse, Marie Queene of Scotland . . . with a Declaration, as well of her Right, Title and Interest to the Suc-/cession of the Croune of Eng-/land . . .* Leslie presented "Mary as the only true heir to the throne of England."¹⁴⁶ Another work, published anonymously in 1572 but often attributed to Leslie, entitled *A Treatise / of Treasons . . .*, was highly critical of Elizabeth's government. In response, the government issued the Proclamation of September 28, 1573, prohibiting the publication of all Catholic "bookes and libelles."¹⁴⁷

After 1573, the Louvainists turned away from works that debated political and jurisdictional issues and began publishing religious tracts that the priests from Mary Tudor's reign and the new missionary graduates from the college at Douai could use as pastoral aids in their ministrations to English Catholics.¹⁴⁸ The arrival of the missionary priests had an impact that surpassed their actual numbers, for they were exceedingly well trained in Catholic doctrine as well as in the methods of homiletics. Their work challenged the government's policies of relying on a latitudinarian religious settlement and lax enforcement of uniformity as the means for the conversion of the realm to a moderate form of Protestantism.

William Allen, an Oxford-educated Catholic cleric from a gentry family in Lancashire, founded the college at Douai in the Spanish Netherlands in 1568. Its purpose was to train clergy to serve the spiritual needs of English Catholics and to help restore the old religion in England when circumstances might permit. The Douai graduates heard confessions, administered the sacraments, and

145. Southern, *Elizabethan Recusant Prose*, 126–35, 499–501.

146. *Ibid.*, 443.

147. *Ibid.*, 445. See also Holmes, *Resistance and Compromise*, 23–26.

148. *Ibid.*, 33–34.

preached in the vernacular. Though they were not trained primarily as proselytizers, the government nevertheless perceived them as such. In 1574, the first seminary graduates came to England; by 1580 approximately one hundred missionary priests had arrived.¹⁴⁹ In a letter to William Allen from 1575, one of the covert priests reported that Lord Burghley had stated “for one staunch Catholic at the beginning of the reign, there were now, he knew for certain, ten.”¹⁵⁰

The Douai graduates began arriving in England shortly after the pope excommunicated Elizabeth. In 1566, an austere Dominican and former grand inquisitor became Pope Pius V. Four years later he fulminated the bull *Regnans in excelsis*, excommunicating and deposing Queen Elizabeth:

[W]e declare the aforesaid Elizabeth to be heretic and an abetter of heretics, and we declare her, together with her supporters in the above-said matters, to have incurred the sentence of excommunication and to be cut off from the unity of the Body of Christ.

Furthermore we declare her to be deprived of her pretended claim to the aforesaid kingdom and of all lordship, dignity and privilege whatsoever.

Also, we declare that the lords, subjects and peoples of the said kingdom, and all others who have sworn allegiance to her in any way, are perpetually absolved from any oath of this kind.¹⁵¹

This bull freed English Catholics from obedience to their queen and encouraged them to join in resistance to her and the Protestant religious settlement.

In 1571 and 1572, yet another threat to the religious settlement came to light in the form of the Ridolfi Plot, a scheme to overthrow Elizabeth and restore Catholicism in England. Roberto Ridolfi, a Florentine banker who served as the pope's agent in London, orchestrated an elaborate conspiracy to bring together Philip II of Spain, the Duke of Alva (Philip's governor-general in the Spanish Netherlands), Guerau de Spes (Philip's ambassador to England), Pius V, Mary Stuart, the bishop of Ross, and the Duke of Norfolk in a plot in which the duke and other Catholic nobles would lead disgruntled Catholics in open insurrection. An invading force of eight thousand Spanish troops was to join the insurgents once the revolt was under way. The rebels were to capture Elizabeth, free Mary from house arrest, and place her on the throne. The

149. McGrath, *Papists and Puritans*, 111.

150. Quoted in *ibid.*, 112.

151. Ehler and Morrall, *Church and State*, 183.

plan failed thanks to the efficient espionage of Lord Burghley. The government imprisoned the bishop of Ross, stripped him and de Spes of their recognition as ambassadors, and executed the Duke of Norfolk. Mary remained under house arrest where she continued to serve as a magnet attracting those who wished to reestablish Catholicism in England.¹⁵²

Across the Channel, Catholics and Calvinists were engaged in the bloody combat of the French Wars of Religion and the Revolt of the Netherlands. Events during the course of these wars highlighted the dangers facing Protestantism. One of these was the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre that occurred in Paris and twelve other cities in the French provinces during the months of August to October of 1572.¹⁵³ The bloodletting began in Paris shortly after the marriage of the Huguenot Henry of Navarre to the king's sister Marguerite of Valois. The queen mother, Catherine de Médicis, had arranged this union in an attempt to achieve greater harmony between Catholics and Protestants. Henry of Navarre had emerged as one of the principal Protestant leaders, and many of his noble supporters came to Paris to witness the marriage (August 18, 1572). Four days later, an assassin attempted to kill Gaspard de Coligny, another important Huguenot leader who served as the admiral of France. The available primary sources do not reveal with certainty the person responsible for this failed assassination. Coligny chose to stay in Paris, believing that the king would protect him. This decision in turn encouraged other Huguenot nobles who were in Paris for the wedding to stay in the city, even though they were furious about the assault against Coligny. They openly expressed their anger and threatened revenge. The Catholic majority in Paris was likewise angry at the Huguenots, having been stirred up by Catholic polemical sermons calling for death to the heretics.

On August 23, Charles IX claimed to have received information that Huguenot troops were planning to attack Paris, capture the king, and kill the leaders of the Catholic faction. To counter this perceived threat, Charles ordered the assassination of two to three dozen Huguenot leaders who were still in Paris. Catherine de Médicis or Duke Henry of Guise may have pressured Charles into this decision, but he later took full responsibility for this

152. See Morrissey, "The Ridolfi Plot." Note that Edwards, *Dangerous Queen*, puts forward an alternate interpretation of the plot in which Ridolfi plays the role of a secret agent for the English government rather than the organizer of a revolt for the papacy.

153. The following summary of the events of the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacres follows the account of Diefendorf, *Beneath the Cross*, 93–106; Holt, *French Wars of Religion*, 76–97; and Benedict, "Saint Bartholomew's Massacres in the Provinces," 205–25.

action. To carry out the murders, Duke Henry of Guise and other Catholic leaders took charge of about one hundred royal guards. In the early hours of August 24, these troops began the systematic murder of Huguenot noblemen. Admiral Coligny was one of the first to die, dispatched at the hands of men under the direct command of the Duke of Guise.

During the next three days, a popular fury swept through Catholic Paris. The mass hysteria that led ordinary civilians to murder their Protestant neighbors resulted, in part, from the Catholic propaganda that called for the Huguenot heretics not only to be killed, but to be humiliated and dishonored. For example, a mob seized Coligny's corpse, cut off the head, hands, and genitals, dragged the mutilated body through the streets of Paris, hung it by its feet from the gallows, set it on fire, and finally threw it into the Seine.¹⁵⁴ Before the murderous riot ended, approximately two thousand Protestants had been killed in Paris.¹⁵⁵

But that was not the end of the massacre. News of the murders in the capital spread to the countryside almost immediately. Violence erupted in twelve provincial towns where the Huguenots had formed a large enough minority to pose a threat to the Catholic majority.¹⁵⁶ Believing they had royal approval, mobs began massacring Huguenots, mutilating their corpses, and disemboweling the pregnant women whom they killed.¹⁵⁷ Current scholarship estimates that approximately three thousand Protestants were murdered in the provinces.¹⁵⁸

News of the massacres reached England through Huguenot refugees as well as through printed reports. Just after the killings ended in Paris, a Spaniard in London observed that "the people here are panic-stricken."¹⁵⁹ French refugees came to England by the thousands, settling on the Channel Islands, along the southern coast, and in London and other cities.¹⁶⁰ The printed reports included a translation of François Hotman's *De furoribus Gallicis* with

154. Holt, *French Wars of Religion*, 87; Hotman, *A true and plaine report of the Furious outrages of Fraunce . . .*, lvii.

155. Diefendorf, "Prologue to a Massacre," 1067. Diefendorf cites Janine Estèbe, *Tocsin pour un massacre: La saison des Saint-Barthélemy* (Paris: Le Centurion, 1968), 201.

156. Benedict, "St. Bartholomew's Massacres in the Provinces," 220.

157. *Ibid.*, 221, 225.

158. *Ibid.*, 207, 207n5.

159. Antonio de Guaras to the Duke of Alba, August 30, 1572, quoted in Probasco, "Composed Criticism, Indisputable Innuendo, and Overt Outrage," 72.

160. Kingdon, *Myths about the St. Bartholomew's Day*, 21.

the English title *A true and plaine report of the Furious outrages of Fraunce, & the horrible and shameful slaughter of CHASTILLION the Admiral, and diuers other Noble and excellent men . . .* (1573). Another such work was Jean de Serres's *The Three partes of Commentaries, Containing the whole and perfect discourse of the ciuill warres of Fraunce . . .* (1574), the tenth book of which was a reprint of Hotman's *True and plaine report*. In 1575, a translation of a biography attributed to Henri Estienne appeared with the English title *A Mervaylous discourse vpon the lyfe, deedes, and behauiours of Katherine de Medicis, Queen mother . . .*, which placed the blame for the massacres on Catherine de Médicis. In 1576, an English version of a work by Jean de Serres appeared with the title *The lyfe of the most godly, valeant and noble capteine and maintener of the trew Christian religion in Fraunce, Iasper Colignie Shatilion, sometyme greate Admirall of Fraunce*.¹⁶¹ Also in 1576, an edition of John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* appeared in which he made reference to the massacres as a "matter of common knowledge."¹⁶²

These works extolled the innocent victims and condemned the perpetrators. Hotman, for example, claimed that Pope Pius V had recruited the French king to support his war against "all those Princes that did permitte vse of the reformed Religion within their dominions."¹⁶³ The Elizabethan populace became convinced that the massacres in France were part of a larger Counter-Reformation pattern of events including Elizabeth's excommunication, the Ridolfi Plot, the conspiracies around Mary Stuart, and the brutal suppression of the Protestants in the Netherlands. They mistakenly believed that these events were not only related, but were also part of a vast plan, organized and directed by the pope.¹⁶⁴ From England's point of view, it was easy to conclude that the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre was another example of a threatening Catholic resurgence.

Four years after the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacres, another devastating holocaust took place when Philip II's Army of Flanders mutinied, sacked the city of Antwerp, and murdered thousands of the inhabitants. News of the death and destruction reached England by way of news tracts, broadsheets, and ballads. Collectively known by the term "alarum literature," these reports

161. Dickens, "Elizabethans and St. Bartholomew," 60–61. See also Parmelee, "Printers, Patrons, Readers, and Spies," 856.

162. Dickens, "Elizabethans and St. Bartholomew," 61.

163. Hotman, *A true and plaine report of the Furious outrages of Fraunce . . .*, xxiii.

164. Dickens, "Elizabethans and St. Bartholomew," 67.

typically focused on the themes of Catholic zealotry, Protestant complacency, and urban hedonism.¹⁶⁵ Simply put, they argued that because of sinfulness concentrated in urban centers such as Antwerp, God allowed the brutal Spanish army to be victorious. Londoners should therefore repent and mend their immoral ways in order to save themselves from a similar fate. The English translation of Melanchthon's tract and especially its prefaces align this publication with other alarum literature appearing in the late 1570s.

To understand the sack of Antwerp, the so-called Spanish Fury, it is necessary to place it in the context of the revolt of the Low Countries against King Philip II of Spain.¹⁶⁶ A protest by the nobility against the government's harsh prosecution of suspected Protestants began the first phase of the revolt. Four hundred nobles signed a mutual pledge known as the Compromise of the Nobility, calling for the abolition of the Inquisition and a moderation of the anti-heresy laws; three hundred of their number presented this document to the king's governor-general, Margaret of Parma, on April 5, 1566. During the presentation, a Catholic magnate referred to the petitioners as beggars; the document thus came to be called the Protest of the Beggars. The authors of the compromise stated that the Inquisition "would abolish all ancient privileges, liberties, and immunities and thereby not only make the burghers and common people of this country wretched and everlasting slaves of the Inquisition . . . but would also compel the magistrates, officials, and the entire nobility to submit to the mercy of their inquiries and searches."¹⁶⁷

In the months following the presentation of the compromise, frequent outdoor Calvinist prayer meetings began to take place on lands belonging to noble sympathizers. Soon the unauthorized conventicles turned violent as vandals attacked roadside crosses, shrines, churches, chapels, and convents.¹⁶⁸ In some cases, the plundering mobs consisted of Calvinists who genuinely believed that Catholic images needed to be removed from the churches. Other participants, however, were simply hired thugs, drawn from the ranks of "unemployed, manual laborers, habitual drunkards, whores, and boys in their early teens."¹⁶⁹

165. Buchanan, "Massacre of St. Bartholomew . . . and the Sack of Antwerp," 188, 199; Pratt, "Antwerp and the Elizabethan Mind," 53–54.

166. For a discussion of the revolt of the Low Countries from 1566 to 1576, see Parker, *Dutch Revolt*, chaps. 2, 3.

167. Rowen, *Low Countries in Early Modern Times*, 30.

168. Parker, *Dutch Revolt*, 77 provides a map showing locations of iconoclastic destruction in 1566.

169. *Ibid.*, 78.

Even before the noble protest and the iconoclastic fury, Philip II was inclined to take military action. In the aftermath of the events of 1566, he sent the Duke of Alva to the Low Countries to enforce his policies. The duke commanded a force of ten thousand men, who joined the ten thousand soldiers already in service to the governor-general.¹⁷⁰ Margaret soon resigned and Alva succeeded her as governor and captain-general. He set up the infamous Council of Troubles (September 1567), which began investigating, arresting, and punishing those involved in the revolt, condemning some one thousand individuals to death. Nobles and townsmen alike opposed the brutality of Alva's occupation and the imposition of new taxes; open warfare ensued between the Dutch rebels and the forces of Alva.

At the same time that Spain was trying to suppress this rebellion, it was also involved in a war against the Turks in the Mediterranean. The cost of these two enterprises was more than Philip could afford. On September 1, 1575, the king declared bankruptcy. In so doing, he made it impossible to send money to the Netherlands. In November 1575, Alva's successor, Don Luis de Requesens, wrote, "This Decree of Bankruptcy has been such a blow to the Exchange here that no one in it has any credit . . . I cannot find a single penny. Nor can I see how the King could send money here, even if he had it in abundance. Short of a miracle, all this military machine will fall into ruins."¹⁷¹ On July 25, 1576, with their pay two years in arrears,¹⁷² the troops mutinied, sacked the town of Aalst, and moved against Antwerp.

The mutiny of 1576 was only one of several such organized protests through which the Army of Flanders attempted to force payment of its arrears or acquire plunder in lieu of unpaid wages. Mutinies took place each year from 1573 to 1576. Far from being spontaneous, chaotic riots, the mutinies were well organized and quite disciplined. The mutineers elected a leader, an *electo*, and a council of men to advise him. The *electo* held absolute authority and maintained discipline "with an iron hand."¹⁷³ As a seventeenth-century historian of the wars in Flanders wrote, "never has disobedience been seen which produced greater obedience."¹⁷⁴

170. Ibid., 102. For a discussion of the Army of Flanders and the Dutch Revolt, see Parker, *Army of Flanders*, 231–36.

171. Quoted in Parker, *Army of Flanders*, 235.

172. Parker, *Dutch Revolt*, 172; the light cavalry was owed six years' back pay in 1576.

173. Parker, *Army of Flanders*, 188.

174. Guido Bentivoglio, *The History of the Wars of Flanders* (1678), quoted in ibid., 189.

On November 4, 1576, some 5,600 Spanish troops easily overwhelmed the defenders of Antwerp.¹⁷⁵ The *electo*, carrying a banner showing a crucifix on one side and a picture of the Virgin Mary on the other, led the attackers as they rampaged through the city shouting “Saint James, Spain, blood, flesh, fire, sack!”¹⁷⁶ They set the city on fire, destroying one thousand buildings, including the city hall. The plundering continued for four days. In all, approximately eight thousand men, women, and children were murdered; countless others were tortured as the mutineers searched for gold, silver, jewels, and other luxuries.¹⁷⁷

When the attack occurred, Antwerp was one of the wealthiest cities of northern Europe. With a population in excess of one hundred thousand, it was Europe’s commercial and banking center. Its wealth was based on trade from Portugal, Italy, southern Germany, France, England, and the Hansa. A Venetian envoy described Antwerp as “Venice outdone.”¹⁷⁸ Ludovico Guicciardini, nephew of the Florentine historian Francesco Guicciardini, wrote in his *Description of the Low Countries* that Antwerp was “maruelouslie wel furnished both out of their owne countrey and out of forren countreyes, of all kind of victuals and dainties, both for the necessary vse of man, and also for wantonnesse.”¹⁷⁹

Elizabethan England had an especially close relationship with Antwerp, the nearest major Continental commercial center to London and an extremely important trading partner. Guicciardini noted that the commercial traffic between England and the Low Countries was such “that hardlye can they lieue the one nation without the other.”¹⁸⁰ Antwerp was the center of this vital commerce. When bad things happened to Antwerp, Englishmen took note, fearing that a similar evil might come to them.

As noted above, the writings that reported the sack of Antwerp to England are part of a genre known as “alarum literature.”¹⁸¹ In typical medieval

175. Motley, *Rise of the Dutch Republic*, 3:106. The attacking mutineers included the forces from Aalst, the soldiers in Antwerp’s citadel, and German mercenaries numbering eight hundred to one thousand. *Ibid.*, 3:104–21, provides a detailed narrative of the sack of Antwerp.

176. *Ibid.*, 3:108.

177. *Ibid.*, 3:111.

178. Murray, *Antwerp in the Age of Plantin and Brueghel*, 43.

179. Guicciardini, *Description of the Low Countries*, 26v.

180. *Ibid.*, 40v.

181. Buchanan, “Massacres of St. Bartholomew . . . and the Sack of Antwerp,” app. 2, “Tracts published in England relating to the revolt in the Low Countries (1571–1576),” 240–41, provides a list of alarum

fashion, these writings assume that misfortune results from divine punishment of immorality, pride, and vanity. Two examples, written shortly after the event, can serve as illustrations: George Gascoigne's *The spoyle of Antwerpe* and Rafe Norris's "A warning to London by the fall of Antwerp." George Gascoigne, an early Elizabethan soldier-poet, blames the destruction of Antwerp on two factors: divine punishment for the hedonism of a sinful city and the barbarous cruelty of the Spanish. He wrote, let my words "stande as a Lanterne of light between two perillous Rockes," i.e., the "wickednesse" of Antwerp, which was a "sufficient cause of Gods so iust a scorge and Plague" and the "furie of the vanquishers" that was "more barbarous and cruell, then may become a good christian conquerour."¹⁸²

The Army of Flanders was commonly referred to as the "Catholic Army" or the "army of the Catholic king."¹⁸³ Therefore, one should not make too much of the fact that Gascoigne characterizes the mutineers as "Spanish" rather than "Catholic." His readers would have assumed the Spanish to be Catholic. At one point, he specifically criticizes the Spanish as Catholics, writing that the Spaniards had as much reverence for the church and churchyard "(for all their hipocriticall boasting of the catholique religion) as the Butcher hath to his shambles or slaughter house."¹⁸⁴ Nevertheless, his vocabulary is generally more "ethnic" than "confessional."¹⁸⁵

He describes the Spanish not only as hypocrites, but also as morally depraved. For example, he tells of the parents of a young daughter who were forced to fetch her from the cloister where she had sought safety to "bestow her in bed between two Spaniards, to worke their wicked and detestable evil with her."¹⁸⁶ Further, he depicts Antwerp after the sack as being in the hands

publications up to and including the sack of Antwerp; app. 3, 242–244, lists alarum writings for the period of 1577 to 1580.

182. Gascoigne, *The spoyle of Antwerpe*, A2v. Austen, *George Gascoigne*, 186–95, provides a succinct summary of *The spoyle of Antwerpe*. For a review of current scholarship pertaining to Gascoigne's life and works, see Hamrick, "Introduction . . . Fortunes of George Gascoigne."

183. Parker, *Army of Flanders*, 178.

184. Gascoigne, *Spoyle of Antwerp*, Bviii[r–v].

185. Buchanan, "Massacre of St. Bartholomew . . . and the Sack of Antwerp," 211, states, "The *Spoyle* suggested there was a simple ethno-political, rather than more complex ideological-confessional, aspect to the wars in the Low Countries." I do not disagree with this assessment, but my focus is on Gascoigne's language rather than his analysis of causation. I agree with Linda Bradley Salamon, "Gascoigne's Globe," ¶23, where she states, "Gascoigne uses modulated registers in order to tell the truth about what he has seen, yet to maintain a politic third-person distance from what are in fact expressions of shock and sorrow far beyond his soldier's factual presentation."

186. Gascoigne, *Spoyle of Antwerp*, Ci[v].

of murderers and strumpets, noting that “euery Dom Diego must walk ietting [walk pompously] up and downe the streetes with his harlotte by him in her cheine and bracelettes of golde.”¹⁸⁷

In addition to Gascoigne’s tract, several ephemeral broadsheet ballads warned that London awaited Antwerp’s fate. In some cases, the texts of the ballads no longer exist, though their titles suggest their content. For example, “A warnynge songe to Cities all to beware by Andwerps fall” (January 25, 1577), or “Heavie newes to all Christendom from the woofull towne of Antwerp come” (July 1, 1577).¹⁸⁸ One ballad whose text has survived is Rafe Norris’s “A warning to London by the fall of Antwerp.” In six verses, this ballad warns London that “The scourge which late on Antwerp fel: Thy wrack and ruine dooth foretell.” One stanza in particular illustrates the alarum genre:

Let *Antvverp* warning be,
 thou stately *London* to beware:
 Lest resting in thy glee,
 thou wrapst thy self in wretched care
 Be vigilant, sleepe not in sin:
 Lest that thy foe doo enter in.
 Keep sure thy trench, prepare thy shot:
 Watch wel, so shall no foil be got.
 Stand fast, play thy parte:
 Quail not but shew an english hart,
 Doubt, dread, stil fear:
 For *Antvverps* plague approacheth neer.¹⁸⁹

The authors of alarum literature believed that God allowed Catholic fanatics to triumph over Protestants as punishment for complacency and immorality. Assuming that their readers shared their perspective on the evils of the Catholic threat, they focused on exhorting Protestants to repentance and moral reform to protect themselves against Counter-Reformation zealotry. John Brooke’s 1579 translation of the French version of Philip Melancthon’s tract on the pope-ass fits into this genre of alarum literature. It appeared at the

187. Ibid., Ciii[r].

188. Pratt, “Antwerp and the Elizabethan Mind,” 54.

189. Norris, “A warning to London by the fall of Antwerp” (1577[?]). Buchanan, “Massacre of St. Bartholomew . . . and the Sack of Antwerp,” 169n6, dates the Norris ballad to 1577. Pratt, “Antwerp and the Elizabethan Mind,” 55, notes that it is possible that this ballad dates from the attack against Antwerp of 1585. I follow Buchanan and the *English Short-Title Catalogue* in dating “A warning to London” to 1577.

end of a decade of re-Catholicization attempts in England and violence against Protestants on the Continent. Both the translator's preface and the preface by Jean Crespin, the publisher of the French edition, call for repentance in the face of the Catholic menace.

John Brooke (d. 1582), a graduate of Trinity College, Cambridge, was a Protestant who translated several French religious works into English.¹⁹⁰ His version of Melanchthon's pope-ass tract consisted of his own preface, a preface by Jean Crespin, a translation of the French text of Melanchthon's work, Luther's addendum (written for the 1535 German edition, which Brooke called the "Approbation"), and Luther's own tract on the monk-calf. Jean Crespin (d. 1572) was a major printer-publisher in Geneva, best known as a Protestant martyrologist and as the publisher of the Geveva Bible.¹⁹¹

The 1557 French translation of *The Pope-Ass Explained* was, in turn, based on Melanchthon's revised and expanded edition of 1535. Thus the English text was considerably longer than the original 1523 version. It was also more strident in tone, for Melanchthon's revisions intensified his original critique of the papal regime.¹⁹² For example, he included a new section pertaining to the head of the ass that expands on the theme of the human origin of papal teachings: "As much difference as there is betweene the brayne of an Asse and the reason and witte of a man, so much difference there is betweene the doctrine and ordinaunces of the Pope, and the Doctrine and instruction of the sonne of God."¹⁹³ Another change expanded the discussion of the monster's human left hand as a symbol of the civil power of the papacy by focusing on wars and bloodshed: "There was neuer king or Emperour which hath made so many warres and which hath shed so much blood."¹⁹⁴

An extensive passage added to the discussion of the monster's nakedness heaps criticism upon clerical lust and uncleanness: "Beholde howe the filthy and vile single lyfe of the papisticall Priestes and Moonkes, must be figured and declared, whiche haue defiled the holy maryage through execrable filthynesse."¹⁹⁵ At the end of the tract, Melanchthon added an eloquent peroration on God's benevolence as shown by his sending the horrible monster

190. DNB, s.v. "Brooke, John."

191. *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, s.v. "Crespin, Jean."

192. Spinks, *Monstrous Births and Visual Culture*, 77–78.

193. Melanchthon, *Of two Woonderful Popish Monsters* (1579), 2r.

194. *Ibid.*, 3r.

195. *Ibid.*, 5v.

as a warning of the “pestilent contagiousnesse of Antichrist and his members” (i.e., the *Antichristus mysticus*): “It is most certeyne that G O D hath vsed towardes vs a most greate benignitie and gentlenesse, for that hee hath sette foorth before vs, Antechrist in a figure so vyle and disformed, as paynted in a table and lyuely sette foorth, that one may easely assayle it with handes, that God will effectually provide for our health, and desireth that we be drawn out of that detestable retrayte of immortall impietie of that straunge beast.”¹⁹⁶

The theme of being “drawn out of that detestable retrayte of immortall impietie” is echoed in the introductory comments of Brooke and Crespin. It is the cautionary and hortative message in their prefaces that align this 1579 publication with the alarum literary genre. Brooke begins his remarks by noting that the appearance of monsters contrary to nature serves to “demonstrate vnto vs the Ire and wrath of God, against vs for our sinnes and wickednesse, that we haue and doe dayly commit agaynst him. But mans heart is so hardened that those his threatnings and foreshewings are reiected as though they were but fables.”¹⁹⁷ He then cites scriptural examples of God’s punishment of sinners who persisted in their wickedness: the flood at the time of Noah, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the earth swallowing up Korah, Dathan, and Abiram [Num. 16:31]. He adds, “Therefore the rather to moue the harts of euery good christian to feare & tremble at the sight of such prodigious monsters, I haue taken vpon me to translate out of French into our English tongue these two monsters.”¹⁹⁸ Crespin’s exhortation to repentance is even more direct: “But as for vs we doe feare such aduertisementes of God, let vs consider diligently his wondrous woorkes, and preuent the effectes of his iudgementes thorow true repentaunce.”¹⁹⁹

Brooke’s 1579 translation offers a caution against the threat posed by the papal regime and an exhortation to repentance as a means of protection against God’s punishment through Catholic zealotry. He chose to translate the explications of “two of the best-known visual images of Reformation polemic”²⁰⁰ to introduce them to an English readership, to make available their arguments against papal authority, and to present them as an alarm to

196. *Ibid.*, 8r.

197. *Ibid.*, Aii[r].

198. *Ibid.*

199. *Ibid.*, Aiii[v].

200. Spinks, *Monstrous Births and Visual Culture*, 62.

English Protestants facing Catholic resurgence at home and abroad during the 1570s.

In 1579, the persuasive power and impact of the Roman monster as a figure of the papal Antichrist was still undiminished. By then, the pope-ass had become an essential trope in the lexicon of Protestant polemics. Luther's prolific use of asinine terminology, the frequent republication and translation of Melancthon's tract, the inclusion of the monstrosity in apocalyptic wonderbooks, and the appropriation of the monster's image within religious controversies in France and England are evidence of the enduring polemical power of this icon with its potential for diverse interpretations. For Catholics like Arnaud Sorbin, it represented Martin Luther and his heretical teachings. For Protestants, however, it depicted the evils of Roman Catholicism—an overreaching pope, exploitative canon law, and morally corrupt clergy. Given the appeal and wide use of the Roman monster in Reformation polemics, the study of its diffusion within the discourse of the Reformation opens a new perspective on the momentous religious and social changes of the sixteenth century.

Conclusion

The Pope-Ass as a Trope of Antipapalism in Reformation Politics

FROM THE LATE FIFTEENTH CENTURY to the latter part of the sixteenth century, religious nonconformists, protesters, and reformers made use of the image of the Roman monster as a polemical trope to help them express their ideas. They were drawn to this image because they perceived it to have formidable persuasive power. Usually the Tiber monstrosity served the interests of antipapalism,¹ though Arnaud Sorbin developed an interpretation that he directed against Luther and the French Protestants. Circumstantial evidence connects the earliest representation of the monster with the Roman Waldensian community and the Bohemian Brethren where it symbolized the anti-Constantinianism of these two groups. But it was Philip Melanchthon's *The Pope-Ass Explained* that introduced a much more elaborate interpretation of the monster into Reformation polemics. He cleverly conflated Lutheran teachings, the traditional commonplaces of the papal Antichrist, and the physical characteristics of the Roman monster itself into a new polemical trope: the pope-ass.

The persuasive power of this figure came from several factors. To begin with, sixteenth-century Christians believed that abnormalities in nature conveyed messages from God; the notion that God sent the monstrosity as a portent gave it divine authority. As Luther stated in his 1535 addendum to Melanchthon's tract, "because the sublime, divine majesty himself created and depicted it [the pope-ass], the whole world should be horrified and shudder, for from it one can conjecture the thought and intention of God."² The mean-

1. Kaminsky, *History of the Hussite Revolution*, 19, coined the term "antipapalist" to describe Matthew of Janov's opposition to the secularizing effect on the church that came from papal efforts to dominate both the spiritual and the secular spheres and the "resulting permeation of the church by the world." I use the term both in this late medieval sense as well as in the modern sense of opposition to the institution of the papacy based upon theological and/or ecclesiological reasons.

2. Melanchthon, *Der BapstEsel* (1535), Ci[r].

ing of the monster, however, needed to be explained; its symbolism needed to be interpreted.

The monster's symbols were especially powerful because they consisted of well-understood historical and folkloric images whose connotative meanings stood for ridicule, defamation, carnality, false belief, and demonology. Also, the illustration of the creature placed it in a landscape that referenced papal jurisdictional claims over spiritual and secular affairs. The defamatory, demonic elements of the monster's physiognomy symbolically condemned these signs of papal jurisdictional claims. The use of a readily intelligible iconography meant that the illustration itself could speak to a wide international audience whose members could understand the picture's meaning even if they could not read.

For the reader, Melanchthon interpreted the monster by drawing on the topos of an animalized monstrosity as a metaphor for the papal Antichrist. This commonplace achieved its fully elaborated form in the fifteenth-century Czech treatise *The Anatomy of the Antichrist*. Melanchthon's interpretation presumes belief in the reality of the Antichrist, and more particularly in the notion of the papal Antichrist. He followed the anatomical meanings described in the *Anatomy*, interpreting the monstrosity as a figure of the papal Antichrist.

Together with a belief in the Antichrist, a belief in the impending apocalypse also helped give the pope-ass its persuasive power. The apocalyptic vision interpreted contemporary and historical events through the lens of the imminent end of time. In this context, a monstrous portent suggested that the coming of the Antichrist was a prelude to the end of the world. This was the meaning that the wonder-book authors imputed to the monster.

Finally, Melanchthon's creative conflation of the topos of the animalized papal Antichrist, the image of the Roman monster itself, and the ideas of the Lutheran reform movement made the pope-ass into powerful propaganda. Melanchthon derived his content from the context of Lutheran theological ideas and institutional criticisms of the Roman Church. His tract thus addressed topics such as Luther's new faith-based definition of the church, papal jurisdictional claims, solifidianism, indulgences, penance, clerical celibacy and sexual immorality, Scholasticism, canon law, etc. All of these topics were being hotly debated in the years before 1523, when *The Pope-Ass Explained* first was published.

Luther and Melanchthon obviously realized that the Roman monster could serve as a powerful trope, but so also did men such as Jean Crespin, John Barthlet, and John Brooke. Each of these individuals turned to the symbolism and meaning of the pope-ass to buttress Protestantism when they perceived the new faith to be under attack. Even the French Catholic Arnaud Sorbin recognized the persuasive potential of this monstrous portent, though his anti-Protestant interpretation ended up sounding forced and carping.

The illustration of the Roman monster, Melanchthon's interpretation of it, and the history behind both the image and the explication illustrate the importance of antipapalism, antichristology, apocalypticism, and the symbolism of an animalized monstrosity as a metaphor for the papal Antichrist in the efforts of religious reformers to establish and defend a new view of Christendom that had no place for the papacy. The story behind the pope-ass demonstrates that belief in the Antichrist continued from the Middle Ages into the sixteenth century and interconnected with antipapalism in the topos of the papal Antichrist; that Luther's new *fides*-ecclesiology redefined the nature of the church in a way that subverted the pope as *caput ecclesiae*; that apocalypticism was an essential part of the sixteenth-century Christian worldview; that image, symbol, and metaphor had great power in religious debate; and that religious polemics used antipapalism, antichristology, apocalypticism, and metaphorical monstrosity in making the case for new Protestant theological and ecclesiological ideas.

Appendix

The Pope-Ass Explained (1523) by Philip Melanchthon¹

[375/1] God has always wonderfully represented his mercy or wrath through certain signs, and especially through signs representing the rulers, as we see in Daniel 8 [Dan. 8:3].² There he has even announced the reign of the Roman Antichrist in order that [375/5] all true Christians might know to defend themselves against his villainy, which is so deceitfully set forth that even the elect saints might be misled thereby, as Christ says in Matthew 24[:24]. Therefore, in the middle period of [Antichrist's] reign, God has given many signs, most recently this abominable figure, the pope-ass, which was found dead in the Tiber at Rome, in the year 1496. It portrays and represents the [375/10] entire essence of the papal realm so accurately that no human being could possibly have made it up, but one must rather say that God himself has fashioned this abomination in its likeness.

First, the ass's head signifies the pope. For the church is a spiritual body and a spiritual realm, gathered in the spirit. Therefore, it should and [375/15] can have neither a corporeal head nor an external lord. Rather, only Christ is its head and lord, who reigns within, in the spirit, in the believers' hearts, through faith. Now, however, the pope has set himself up as an external, corporeal head of the church. For that reason, he is signified through this ass's head on a human body. For just as an ass's head makes no sense on a human body, so [375/20] the pope makes no sense as the head of the church. In scripture too, the ass signifies an external, carnal essence, Exodus 13[:13].

1. This translation is based on the 1523 publication indicated as version A1 in WA, 11:375–79. Grey numbers in brackets print indicate line numbers in the text. Scriptural references that are incomplete or that have typographical errors in the original are corrected; these emendations are shown in brackets. Scriptural quotations are cited from the Douai-Rheims version of the Holy Bible; the English of the Vulgate accurately represents Melanchthon's phrasing when he quotes scripture.

2. A marginal note in WA 11:375 provides a reference to Daniel 8:3. The idea that signs represent rulers is made clear in Daniel 8:3–9.

[376/1] Second, the right hand is like an elephant's foot. It signifies the spiritual power of the pope, with which he tramples under foot all weak consciences, for he destroys souls with his innumerable and unbearable laws, by which he needlessly and without cause loads unspeakable sins and misery upon consciences. In the same way, the elephant, that [376/5] great, heavy animal, tramples and crushes all that comes in his way. For what else is the spiritual rule of the pope than the burdening, oppressing, bewildering, frightening, and tormenting of consciences through vain sacrilege and force by means of coerced confession, chastity, vows, false masses, false penance, by the binding and breaking, allowing and forbidding of oaths, by indulgences, relics, and the like? In short, these [376/10] practices lead believers to stray from the true Christian way of life and faith to a false, external appearance of works and spirituality, Daniel 8[:24], "he shall destroy . . . the people of the saints"; and 2 Timothy 4 [1 Timothy 4:2], "speaking lies in hypocrisy." For the right hand stands for inward things related to souls and consciences, which Christ alone should rule with his sweet, gentle authority. In place of Christ, [376/15] the ass's head rules with its ruinous sacrilege and might.

Third, the left human hand signifies the pope's secular authority, though he is to have no such authority, as Christ says in Luke [22:25–26], "The earthly princes rule over them: but you not so." Yet, with the devil's help, the pope has brought it about so cleverly that he not only has secular authority greater than [376/20] any king, but in addition, he is supreme over all secular authority, a lord over king and princes, whom he has drawn to himself, so that they have helped him obtain that authority and have [377/1] maintained and defended him in it in order that Daniel's prophecy in chapter 8[:24] might come true, where he says, "And his power shall be strengthened, but not by his own force." That is why this is a human hand; for such a realm has thus come into being without any basis in scripture, but only through human arrogance, as when they say it is just and right that [377/5] the heir to the see of St. Peter and the Vicar of Christ should be above everyone, although, God be praised, nowadays everybody understands that the papists are concerned with nothing but villainy.

Fourth, the right foot is the hoof of an ox, signifying the servants of the spiritual authority who support and sustain the papacy in its oppression of souls. [377/10] Those include the papal teachers, preachers, pastors, and father confessors, but especially the Scholastic theologians. For these accursed people do nothing other than promote the unbearable laws of the pope (mentioned

above) among the poor, common people, through their preaching, teaching, and hearing of confessions, and thereby they keep the wretched consciences trapped under the elephant's foot. And they are thus the pillars, footing, and [377/15] foundation of the papacy, which otherwise would not have been able to stand for so long. For Scholastic theology is nothing other than imagined, fabricated, and dammed demonic prattle and monkish daydreams, and yet with it they trample poor souls underfoot, Matthew 24[:24], "there shall arise false Christs and false prophets."

Fifth, the left foot is like a griffon's claw; it signifies the servants of the [377/20] secular authority, the canonists, the people of canon law, who themselves acknowledge that the beloved canons stink of nothing but avarice. For just as the griffon snatches and holds fast with its claws, so, through their canons, the papal servants have snatched for themselves the goods of all of Europe and they relentlessly hold on to them like the devil, for even the canons were invented to serve their insatiable avarice. [377/25] Hence, the whole world, with its body and soul, property and reputation, must be trampled under foot, crushed and ruined by this abomination.

[378/1] Sixth, the female belly and breasts signify the pope's body, namely, the cardinals, bishops, priests, monks, students, and all such crowd of harlots and fatted swine, for their life consists only of gluttony, guzzling, unchastity, lust, and living the good life here on earth, unpunished and liberated to the utmost, so that they [378/5] brazenly live a life like that.

Similarly, this pope-ass carries its woman's belly naked and free, as one can plainly see, and as is written by Daniel and by Paul in 2 Timothy [3:]4, "lovers of pleasures more than of God," and in Philippians 3[:19], "the belly is their God."

Seventh, fish scales are on the arms, legs, and neck and not [378/10] on the breasts or the belly. These signify the secular princes and lords. For in scripture, the sea signifies this world [and] fish signify secular people, as Christ himself interpreted St. Peter's net, Matthew 4[:19]. Thus, the scales signify the sticking together and adhering, as God says in Job 39 [41:7], "One [scale] is joined to another, and not so much as any air can come between them." Hence, princes, lords, and secular [authorities] have always [378/15] depended upon and still depend upon the pope and his rule. And although they wish neither to defend gluttony, unchastity, and lust, nor to approve of it (for there are no scales on the belly and on the breasts, since [the pope's reign] is too openly wicked), nonetheless they tolerate it and adhere all the more

firmly to his neck, arms, and legs, that is, they sanction and defend [378/20] [the pope's] position, as though it were correct and [ordained] by God. Hence, [the pope] holds his head in an obstinate and stubborn way. In addition, the [princes and lords] help support [the pope's] spiritual and secular authority, his unbearable law, teaching, [and] canons, and preserve his temporal goods. Furthermore, they endow cloisters and foundations, universities and churches in which such teachers, preachers, father confessors, doctors, canonists, and theologians forcefully carry on their lives so that [378/25] the pope remains indeed firm and well established. In short, the support and favor of the world adhere to him [so much] that no bit of air, no religious teaching, nor God's Word can separate them from him or disunite them.

Eighth, the old man's head on the backside signifies the decline and end of the papacy. For in scripture the countenance signifies arrival and the [378/30] back or the posterior signifies departure. Thus the apostle says in Hebrews 8[:13], "that which . . . groweth old, is near its end." Thus, this face shows how the papacy comes to its end, and that it grows old and perishes by itself, without [use of] sword or human hands, as Daniel 8[:25] has said, "he . . . shall be broken without hand[s]." For, God's word and the truth [378/35] expose his malice, and thus he goes away. Thus, we see that this figure actually [379/1] agrees with the whole prophecy [of] Daniel 8, and neither is wrong in the least concerning the papacy.

Ninth, the dragon on his backside that opens his mouth wide or spews fire signifies the poisonous, detestable bulls and slanderous books that [379/5] the pope and his people now spew forth into the world, with which they wish to devour everyone, because they feel that they are going to come to an end and must perish. For it is their last and most evil rage, with which they try their utmost [to see] if they might maintain the abomination by fear, threat, and damnation of the people. But it does not help the rogue; he must pass away. For the dragon bites and spews into [379/10] the air to no purpose and in vain, and strikes no one; such wrathful bulls and books no longer affect anyone; the truth is in broad daylight.

Tenth, that this pope-ass was found in Rome and not elsewhere corroborates all of the foregoing, [namely] that one can understand it as referring to no other governance than the one at Rome. Now, at Rome, there is no other governance equal to or greater than [379/15] the papacy. For God always creates his signs at places where their meaning is at home, as happened at Jerusalem. And the fact that it was found dead corroborates that the end of the

papacy is at hand and that it must not be destroyed by sword or by human hand, [but] rather, it comes to death and ruin by itself.

Herewith I wish to have warned everyone not to scorn such a great sign from [379/20] God and to be on guard against the accursed Antichrist and his followers.

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About the Author

Lawrence P. Buck is professor emeritus of history at Widener University. After serving as provost and academic vice president for twenty years at Widener, he returned to full-time teaching from 2004 to 2013. He co-edited *The Social History of the Reformation*, a festschrift in honor of Professor Harold Grimm, and translated *Monemvasia: The Town and Its History*. He received his PhD from Ohio State University.

Of all the curious, horrifying cast of monstrous characters known to early-modern Europeans, the papal ass was certainly one of the strangest. Word of its “dredging up” from the Tiber River in 1496 traveled a circuitous route through sixteenth-century Europe, helping to make the famous images that Cranach and others fashioned to depict it into readily recognizable pieces of the era’s mental furniture. Lawrence Buck’s dogged attempts to cast light upon the trail that knowledge and exploitation of this event followed reveals a great deal about the ways in which religious, scientific, and preternatural knowledge got around in premodern society.

— PHILIP SOERGER

This book is a fascinating and meticulous study of antipapal polemics from the early Reformation to the Elizabethan religious settlement. Lawrence Buck skillfully analyzes the iconography of the various images of a grotesque monstrosity that had been discovered after the Tiber River flooded Rome, and traces the uses they were put to by reformers including Philip Melanchthon’s 1523 pamphlet, *The Pope-Ass Explained*. With abundant illustrations, Buck’s monograph delineates the various elements used to illustrate the monster and its connection to the papal Antichrist. Buck also ties the Roman monster into the discourse of the Reformation including Luther’s use of it, its appearance in wonder-book literature, and its use in polemics as part of the French Wars of Religion and the Elizabethan Reformation. This intriguing book should attract widespread interest from Reformation scholars. It is one of the freshest and most original books to have appeared in several years.

— JONATHAN ZOPHY

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